

Running for School Board

Have you ever thought about running for your local school board? Many people might say that they have given this some thought but few have followed through. Statistics from this years school board elections clearly show that not many people do anything more than just that, think about it.

In 139 school districts spread over 12 counties in Western New York there were only 440 candidates for 278 vacancies. Nearly 43% of all school districts in Western New York had the same number of school board candidates as they had board vacancies. The percentages were even higher in Allegany and Steuben County. In Allegany County 67% of the districts had the same number of candidates as there were vacancies on the Board. In Steuben County 50% of the districts had the same number of candidates as there were vacancies. Where was the choice for district voters?

In these same 139 districts total budget expenditures totaled over \$4.5 billion. This means a very small number of people are even offering themselves for involvement in making huge budgeting decisions for the rest of us. Although many people complain about higher local property taxes, in the one place where a person can make a significant difference, the local school board, few people offer themselves as candidates.

Someone may be wondering why are you talking about a lack of school board candidates in October? The school board elections are held in May, eight months from now. Unfortunately most people who do decide to run for their local school board don't think about it until March or April unless they have a gripe about something or a dispute with someone in the district.

Here are some things you can do now to demonstrate your interest in your local school district and gauge your interest in considering a run for school board sometime in the future.

- Attend a few school board meetings to get a sense of what the important current issues are in the district. (A telephone call to the District Clerk's Office in the district will enable you to find out when and where the Board of Education meets.
- Volunteer for committees or planning teams the district may be putting together.
- Read the District Newsletter when it arrives.
- Join the local Parent Teacher Association (PTA or PTO)
- Offer to be a volunteer in your school
- Talk to school administrators and board members about things you believe they are doing well in addition to any areas of concern you may have.

A school board member must be motivated by a sincere desire to serve the community rather than to achieve personal glory or carry out a personal vendetta. Perhaps the most important work

a board member can do is to help build the community's support and understanding of public education.

Whether you ever become a school board candidate or not, anyone who chooses to get involved in their local school will certainly gain a better understanding of their school and public education in general. Consider taking a first step toward involvement in your school today. Better yet, take a first step tomorrow.

October is School Board Appreciation Month. Remember to thank your current board members for their service to your community.