



Election Action 2025

A School Board Election Handbook



The Alberta Teachers' Association

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This handbook was originally prepared for the Alberta Teachers' Association by Lawrence Martin (1980) and was updated by Randy Hatfield (1983), David Flower (1986), Shelley Russell (1992, 1995), Janet Harvey and Shelley Svidal (2001), Shelley Svidal (2004, 2007, 2010, 2013), and Jonathan Teghtmeyer and Kim Clement (2021). Kristine Wilkinson and Kim Clement prepared this version.

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

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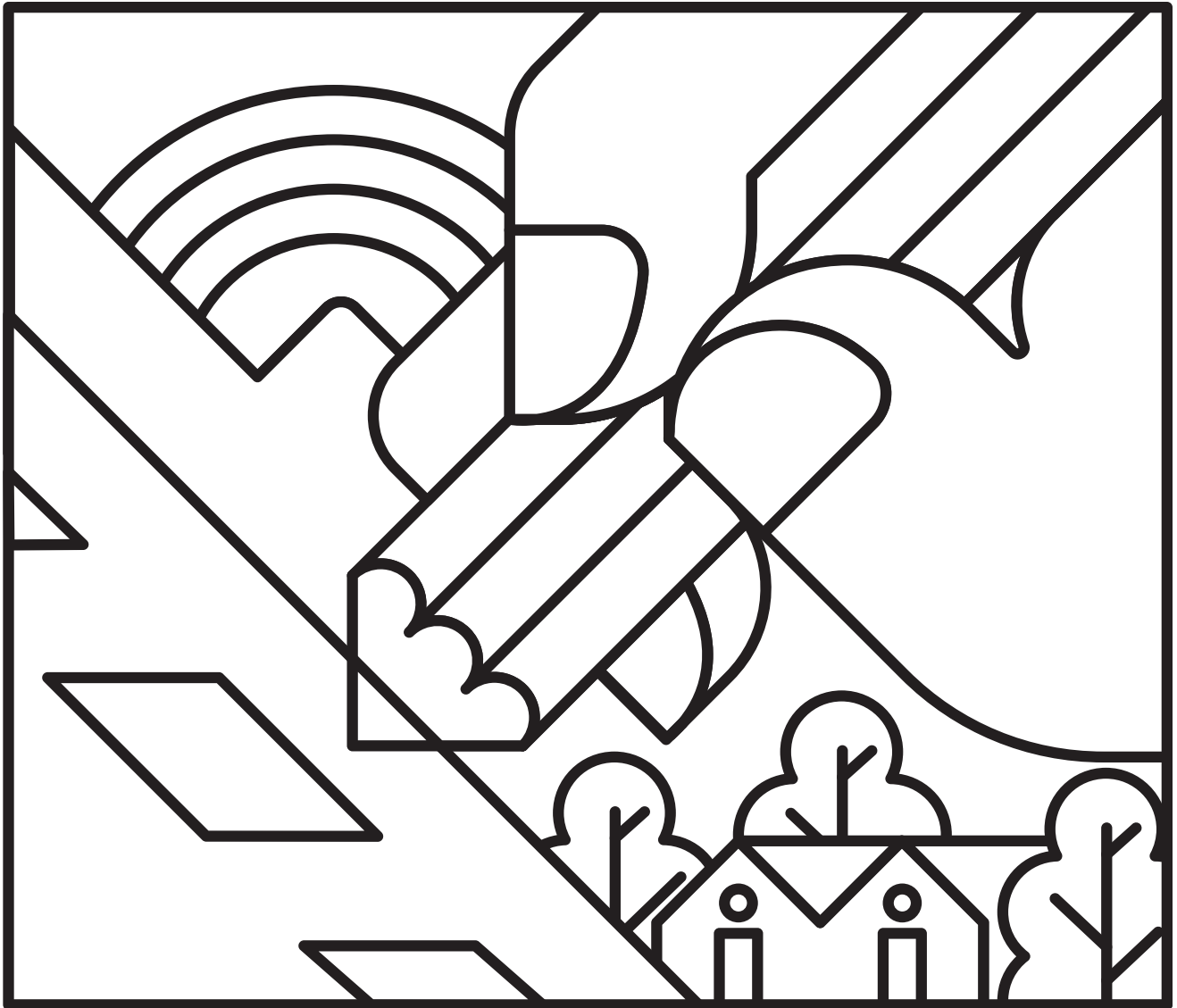
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Getting Started

Why Get Involved?

Why should your Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) local get involved in school board elections?

- Because teachers' salaries, class sizes, inservice training, resources and supplies, and input into local curricula are determined by the school board that is elected.
- Because management-rights and anti-union candidates for school trustee will join fiscal conservatives in attacking public education and teachers during this election. It's up to you to set the issues before they do and to mobilize the pro-education vote.
- Because you understand public education and have the organizational know-how that candidates need.
- Because you can help form a better school board by getting better candidates to run. Unlike most employees, teachers have a say in who their employers will be for the next four years.
- Because good trustees need help to get re-elected.
- Because some education issues are handled through elections rather than through negotiations.
- Because mobilizing the teacher vote and the sympathetic vote can determine who is elected. Results in school board elections tend to be close. Every vote counts.
- Because bad trustees get elected by voters who haven't been told the truth. It's up to teachers to ensure that tough issues are handled intelligently during the campaign.
- Because if teachers do not speak out and act for public education, no one will.
- Because it's a municipal election, and individual trustees speak for themselves rather than adhering to a party line. Your influence can be felt.
- Because it's your democratic right. Active participation is the backbone of democracy.

What Are Some Misconceptions About Election Action?

Trustees Will Retaliate

If you take a strongly partisan stance during campaigning and lose, you may face reprisal from trustees. If you take a slightly partisan or nonpartisan stance, you minimize that risk. Effective nonpartisan action is possible. The risk is usually greater in imagination than in fact.

Getting Involved Could Be Seen as Tampering with the Democratic Process

Active participation in elections *is* the democratic process. Inertia and inaction destroy democracy.

Teachers Don't Have Time

Your negotiating subcommittee spends a lot of time and effort on hammering out your collective agreement. Taking part in school board elections will set the tone for future negotiations and may pay off in your next agreement. If you feel like you don't have time to participate, that's a good sign that you *should* participate. You could win more preparation time and a lighter workload.

One Vote Won't Make Any Difference

In recent school board elections, 4 per cent of elections were decided by fewer than 10 votes, and 25 per cent of elections were decided by fewer than 100 votes. The teacher vote and the sympathetic vote could make the difference between defeat and victory.

The Local Will Be Split

Some teachers don't believe that their local should get involved in school board elections. Other teachers do. It's up to you to determine a level of involvement that teachers in your local will feel comfortable with.

What's Involved in Being Involved?

How involved you want to be will determine the number of people and the amount of time and money required for election action.

You can undertake a program that requires only one teacher, a couple hours of work and no money. Or you can undertake a program that involves hundreds of teachers, several weeks of work and considerable money.

Regardless of the extent of your involvement, the most important elements in any election action are enthusiasm and commitment.

Action Checklist

- ❑ Form a small and discreet committee to evaluate the current school board. Teachers on the economic policy committee, teachers with political experience and teachers with calm, even judgment should make up the core committee.
- ❑ Determine your needs and expectations for the election. Be honest about what you want to achieve. Establish your high-priority objectives. Be specific.
- ❑ Evaluate teachers' interest in and support for election action. Assess your resources realistically in terms of people, time and money. Identify your supporters within the community.
- ❑ Review the action plans in this handbook.
- ❑ Determine whether your local should undertake election activities and the form of those activities.
- ❑ Identify those who will oppose your involvement in the election. Consider people both within and outside the local. Include plans in your overall strategy for neutralizing that opposition.
- ❑ Prepare your overall strategy. Draw up a timeline for action. Assign responsibilities for each activity.

What Factors Are at Play in School Board Elections?

School board elections involve a variety of factors. Recognizing those factors is the first step toward learning how to use them to your advantage. Ignoring them or choosing not to try to influence them usually results in the election of a random selection of trustees—to the benefit of neither teachers nor the public.

The Candidates

Candidates for school board trustee are not easy to find. Trusteeship is generally seen as an obligation rather than a reward. In many jurisdictions, the key to winning the election is simply to ensure that a suitable person is willing to stand for office.

Successful candidates tend to be middle-aged and middle-class and to hold a slightly conservative attitude toward politics. They run for trustee out of a sense of civic duty and do not see the position as a stepping stone to a higher political office.

Many candidates are incumbents. Incumbents stand a good chance of being re-elected—not so much because voters support their policies but, rather, because voters recognize their names. Incumbency is an asset, but it by no means guarantees success.

The Voters

Voters have a short memory, pay little attention to school board elections and generally vote *against* rather than *for* candidates. For that reason, candidates who don't say much stir up little anger and are more likely to be elected than those who publicize their positions on a variety of issues.

The electorate contains a substantial number of people who don't have children and who know little about the public education system. These voters are prime targets for fiscally conservative candidates.

The Issues

In some jurisdictions, election issues emerge naturally from recent events. Which issues dominate depends on which issues are mentioned first, how they are raised and how often they are repeated. Emotional issues summarized in catchy slogans tend to overshadow issues that require careful thought and analysis.

In rural jurisdictions, the personalities of the candidates tend to play more of a role than any single election issue. In urban jurisdictions, names alone can determine the results. When there are many candidates, issues disappear, platforms are obscured, and incumbents are re-elected based simply on name recognition.

A short slogan that combines an issue with a candidate's name can have an impact. Presenting the issue in a way that connects with the public's immediate concerns also helps a candidate stand out. Elections are generally not determined by thinking voters unless those voters are targeted or organized.

Watch for candidates who want to cut costs, who run against flexible programs and who oppose public education practices. Also watch for strong management-rights and anti-union platforms. Teachers can best counter those candidates and platforms by raising the issues first. The best defence is a strong offence.

The Interest Group—Teachers

Interest groups play a minor role in school board elections, but their influence is potentially enormous as a result of the low voter turnout and lack of focus that characterize such elections. Because results tend to be close, groups that organize bloc votes are likely to elect their candidates. Teachers should seek to mobilize the teacher vote and the sympathetic vote.

The Campaigns

School board election campaigns are generally low-key, with few campaign workers involved and little money spent.

In rural jurisdictions, a campaign often entails only one or two ads in the weekly newspaper and a few candidate forums. Traditionally, there are no campaign managers and no calls for workers.

In urban jurisdictions, campaigns may need workers to help with preparing and distributing publicity, canvassing, and undertaking other activities associated with major campaigns.

Mayoral and city council campaigns tend to overshadow school board campaigns. Voters become confused and vote for anyone they can remember. A familiar name and a simple slogan are often enough to elect a trustee.

Candidate forums attract attention, particularly in rural jurisdictions. They work reasonably well with a small number of candidates, but they can be unmanageable with a large number of candidates.

In jurisdictions with many candidates, some candidates campaign successfully on single-issue platforms. By promoting radical (usually conservative) positions, single-issue candidates muster sufficient support to ensure their election. There is little defence against such narrowly focused campaigns, unless an interest group manages to capture the public's imagination with a counterposition. Unfortunately, presenting a counterposition may be seen as defensive and can serve to increase the publicity given to the extremist. Ignoring single-issue candidates is often the best policy.

Publicity and the Media

Publicity wins elections, and exciting and unusual campaigns attract publicity. That is why extremists tend to receive considerable media coverage and votes.

Media coverage of school board elections is usually light. The media usually reports on candidate forums and may print questionnaire responses. That is about all the coverage that can be expected, unless a campaign has an unusual twist. If the campaign is not unusual, it will likely not be reported on. If it is too unusual, the candidate may lose support. (Remember that voters generally vote *against* candidates, not *for* them.)

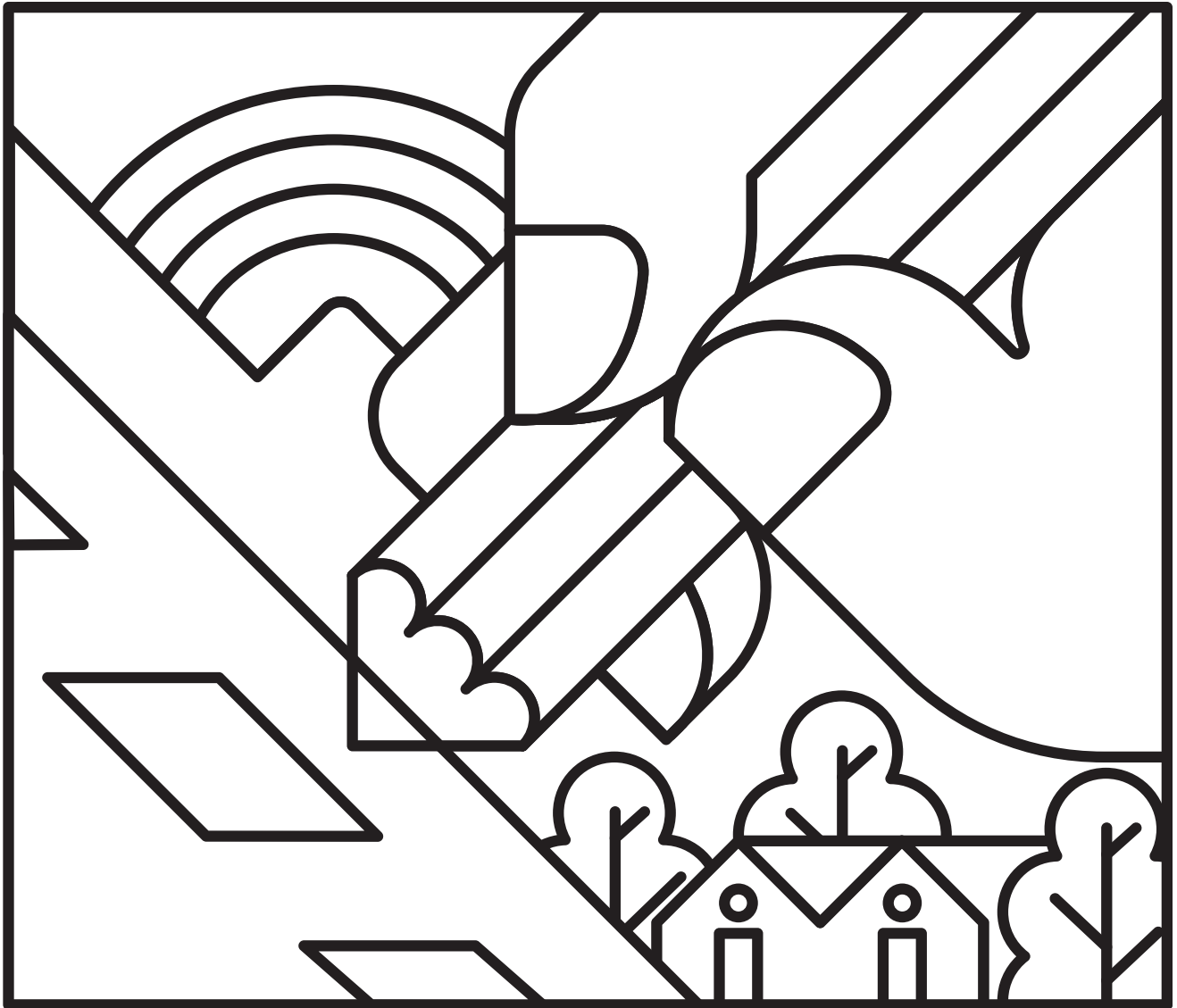
Simple ads, with the candidate's name displayed prominently and a few key phrases, are the most effective. Long-winded ads tend to be ignored.

Voter Turnout

Voter turnout for school board elections is generally low. A turnout of over 60 per cent is considered excellent.

In recent municipal elections across Alberta, voter turnout was only 40 per cent of eligible voters (as reported by municipalities that filed reports with Alberta Municipal Affairs).

Any group that can mobilize its supporters has a very good chance of electing its candidate. Getting your voters to their polling stations is the key to winning the election.



The Electoral Background

Past Election Results and Teachers' Impact

Teachers can have a tremendous impact on school board elections. In some cases, that impact can be realized quite easily. In other cases, a great deal of effort is required.

If you are thinking of taking election action, begin by studying results from the last election in your jurisdiction. (Note that by-election results can be misleading, because voter turnout for by-elections tends to be considerably lower than for general elections.)

Start by checking how many of your trustees were acclaimed or appointed. In recent elections, 48 per cent of trustees took office without a single ballot being cast in their favour. Some of those trustees may be very good, and others may be very bad. Review their performance. If you want change, identify people who would make good trustees and consider encouraging them to stand for office. You can have a major impact on the results simply by persuading someone to run.

In the case of trustees who were elected, examine the election results and determine their margins of victory. If the results were close, think about creating a unified bloc of teacher votes and sympathetic votes. Consider the impact if every teacher influenced five other voters. Teachers' influence can markedly alter election results.

The following table shows the number of full-time, part-time, substitute and on-leave teachers employed in each jurisdiction in the 2023/24 school year (as of November 30). These figures will help you determine teachers' potential impact on the election in your jurisdiction, as well as what type of campaign to run.

In some cases, local precedent can make ostensibly easy campaigns very difficult. If a trustee has been re-elected several times, their return to the board is virtually assured. Or is it? Check local sentiment. The trustee may keep winning only because no one thinks they can be defeated. If the trustee does have solid support, focus on another ward or electoral subdivision. You are the expert when it comes to your school board.

Calculate a rough idea of the number of voters you need to influence. Contact your school board's secretary-treasurer or the local media to determine the size of the electorate and the voter turnout in the last election. In jurisdictions where more than one trustee was elected per ward or electoral subdivision, the number of voters who cast ballots equals the total number of ballots cast divided by the number of trustees elected. In jurisdictions where only one trustee was elected per ward or electoral subdivision, the number of voters who cast ballots equals the total number of recorded votes.

No single election action plan is suitable for all locals. You are the best judge of what will result in improvements to your school board. Examine your jurisdiction's recent election results, and tailor a plan to meet your specific needs.

Number of Teachers by School Jurisdiction, 2023/24

Jurisdiction	FT	PT	Sub	On Leave	Totals
Aspen View School Division	170	16	32	12	230
Battle River School Division	321	53	77	9	460
Black Gold School Division	687	68	156	47	958
Buffalo Trail School Division	214	26	64	12	316
Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School Division	3,175	196	1,233	195	4,799
Calgary School Division	7,208	370	903	502	8,983
Canadian Rockies School Division	138	15	42	1	196
Chinook's Edge School Division	559	59	368	41	1,027
Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate School Division	472	35	84	36	627
Clearview School Division	126	34	41	8	209
East Central Alberta Catholic Separate School Division	118	18	19	14	169
East Central Francophone Education Region	58	14	16	5	93
Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division	2,325	175	353	138	2,991
Edmonton School Division	5,355	642	1,810	488	8,295
Elk Island Catholic Separate School Division	329	47	62	27	465
Elk Island Public School Division	797	153	184	33	1,167
Evergreen Catholic Separate School Division	208	27	57	17	309
Foothills School Division	422	27	100	24	573
Fort McMurray Roman Catholic Separate School Division	361	12	13	23	409
Fort McMurray School Division	365	16	37	20	438
Fort Vermilion School Division	209	12	14	13	248
Golden Hills School Division	375	51	91	20	537
Grande Prairie Roman Catholic Separate School Division	302	31	35	28	396

Grande Prairie School Division	462	18	55	22	557
Grande Yellowhead Public School Division	242	20	55	6	323
Grasslands School Division	223	8	33	2	266
Greater North Central Francophone Education Region	271	24	50	19	364
Greater St Albert Roman Catholic Separate School Division	276	39	74	24	413
High Prairie School Division	192	1	23	12	228
Holy Family Catholic Separate School Division	124	5	22	4	155
Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate School Division	272	18	52	9	351
Horizon School Division	202	18	105	20	345
Lakeland Roman Catholic Separate School Division	162	8	22	7	199
Lethbridge School Division	655	40	99	45	839
Living Waters Catholic Separate School Division	91	2	22	0	115
Livingstone Range School Division	210	18	53	12	293
Medicine Hat Roman Catholic Separate School Division	144	16	43	1	204
Medicine Hat School Division	391	33	69	12	505
Northern Gateway School Division	265	21	54	2	342
Northern Lights School Division	336	10	51	11	408
Northland School Division	144	3	6	9	162
Northwest Francophone Education Region	38	5	7	2	52
Palliser School Division	479	77	193	16	765
Parkland School Division	629	42	153	36	860
Peace River School Division	182	28	26	3	239
Peace Wapiti School Division	373	36	58	12	479
Pembina Hills School Division	228	45	80	13	366
Prairie Land School Division	152	29	24	9	214
Prairie Rose School Division	217	25	59	5	306
Red Deer Catholic Separate School Division	551	57	88	32	728
Red Deer School Division	552	92	133	40	817
Rocky View School Division	1,426	91	241	51	1,809
Southern Francophone Education Region	257	37	33	3	330

St Albert School Division	414	101	118	39	672
St Paul School Division	231	11	48	20	310
St Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Separate School Division	240	16	51	15	322
Sturgeon School Division	345	13	79	4	441
Westwind School Division	243	11	48	3	305
Wetaskiwin School Division	207	18	49	9	283
Wild Rose School Division	235	34	50	9	328
Wolf Creek School Division	372	56	110	20	558

School Jurisdictions and Electoral Procedures

Electoral procedures vary according to the type of school jurisdiction. In some jurisdictions, trustees are elected collectively. In others, trustees are elected individually, from wards or electoral subdivisions.

Your election action plan should consider the procedures specific to your jurisdiction.

Because some locals consist of teachers employed by two or more boards, separate campaigns may be necessary. Whenever possible, the campaigns should focus on similar themes or issues so that activities complement and reinforce one another.

Francophone Education Regions

In francophone education regions, the regional authority is elected by all francophones who have children enrolled in schools operated by the authority. Voters are each entitled to two votes: one for the authority and one for the board of the regional division, school district or school division in which they reside.

None of the four francophone education regions in Alberta lies within a single jurisdiction. Given this overlap, if you are organizing election activities in a francophone education region, consider collaborating with locals organizing activities in the jurisdictions those regions encompass. In the case of francophone parents, the same electors are being targeted.

Regional Divisions

Regional divisions consist of former counties, school districts and/or school divisions that have entered into regional agreements or that have been regionalized by the provincial government. Each former jurisdiction exists as a ward of the regional division, and each ward may be further divided into electoral subdivisions. The more populous the ward or electoral subdivision, the more trustees are elected from it.

Campaigns in regional divisions should recognize that, in many cases, teachers are concentrated in municipalities. This reduces teachers' impact on the election as a whole while increasing their impact in municipal wards or electoral subdivisions.

Still, you should try to reach the rural vote with your election actions, since that vote determines who will sit on the board. Pay considerable attention to the rural vote. Consider distributing special cards identifying polling stations, organizing a telephone blitz, initiating an issues campaign, distributing leaflets or organizing candidate forums.

Make an effort to educate teachers on how their system works so that they recognize the importance of action beyond the municipalities.

Some teachers are employed by a regional division but live in an urban centre with its own school district. Convince these teachers that their vote in that district can influence the school system in which they work. For example, collective agreements reached by district teachers can establish a basis for division teachers to pursue salary parity.

The large number of candidates running in a regional division may complicate election action. For example, if there are nine seats on the board and three candidates running for each seat, that is 27 candidates. This will make a single candidate forum unmanageable. Instead, consider conducting several small forums.

If you decide to distribute a questionnaire to candidates, the summary of candidates' responses that you share with teachers should specify which teachers elect which candidates (for example, "Teachers Living in Hinton, Here Are Your Candidates!").

If teachers in your regional division are unfamiliar with the board's structure, consider distributing a map of the wards and electoral subdivisions, along with a clear explanation of electoral procedures in the division.

School Districts

In most school districts, the board is elected collectively by all eligible voters. Only a handful of districts have ward systems. In either case, public and separate school supporters may cast votes only for their respective candidates. In only a few districts do the losers outnumber the winners. In most cases, one or two candidates are defeated, and five to nine trustees are elected.

Small school districts frequently lack worthwhile candidates, but large districts can attract many candidates. As the size of the district increases, so does the likelihood of incumbents being re-elected. With city council elections occurring at the same time, urban voters become overwhelmed and tend to vote for names they recognize—those of the incumbents.

The district's electoral structure can be a significant issue in a district election. Under the *Local Authorities Election Act*, districts can establish wards. Trustees do not like to do so, in part because establishing wards will alter a system that favours their re-election.

As for election action, candidate forums and questionnaires work well when the number of candidates is small, but they can become a nightmare with 10 or more candidates. Also, forums in large cities tend to be poorly attended and unproductive. Questionnaires can be kept manageable, despite a large slate. Use a chart to summarize the candidates' basic positions on issues, by either recording their yes–no responses or using check marks to indicate whether they agree with ATA policy on those issues.

Large cities tend to attract single-issue candidates. In some cases, candidates latch onto a theme that will muster sufficient support to ensure their election. Because there is little defence against single-issue candidates, you are better off ignoring them. Instead, concentrate on electing other candidates.

In urban districts, advertising strategies will have little effect. The best approach is to mobilize the teacher vote and the sympathetic vote. Urban campaigns tend to require more workers and more-sophisticated strategies. Getting a large number of teachers to commit to working on a candidate's campaign can be very effective in influencing the election results.

As candidates' campaigns become more sophisticated and expensive, so must your local's election action. This requires a lot of planning and hard work.

School Divisions

Election to the board of a school division is comparable to election to the board of a regional division. Each school division consists of electoral subdivisions, with rural subdivisions generally electing one trustee each and urban subdivisions electing more than one trustee.

Like teachers employed by regional divisions, teachers employed by school divisions tend to be concentrated in municipalities. And like elections in regional divisions, elections in school divisions may involve a large number of candidates. Hence, many considerations that apply to election activities in regional divisions also apply to those in school divisions.

Plumping: Increasing Your Weight at the Polls

In many cases, teachers will have the opportunity to vote for more than one candidate for trustee. However, there may not be enough well-qualified candidates to establish an entire board. Faced with that situation, many teachers will vote for a poorly qualified candidate, in addition to their preferred candidates.

Teachers should not take that approach. By voting only for the well-qualified candidates, teachers will increase the chances of those candidates being elected. By refusing to vote for poorly qualified candidates, teachers will effectively withhold votes from them and increase the percentage of votes cast for the well-qualified candidates. This strategy is called plumping.

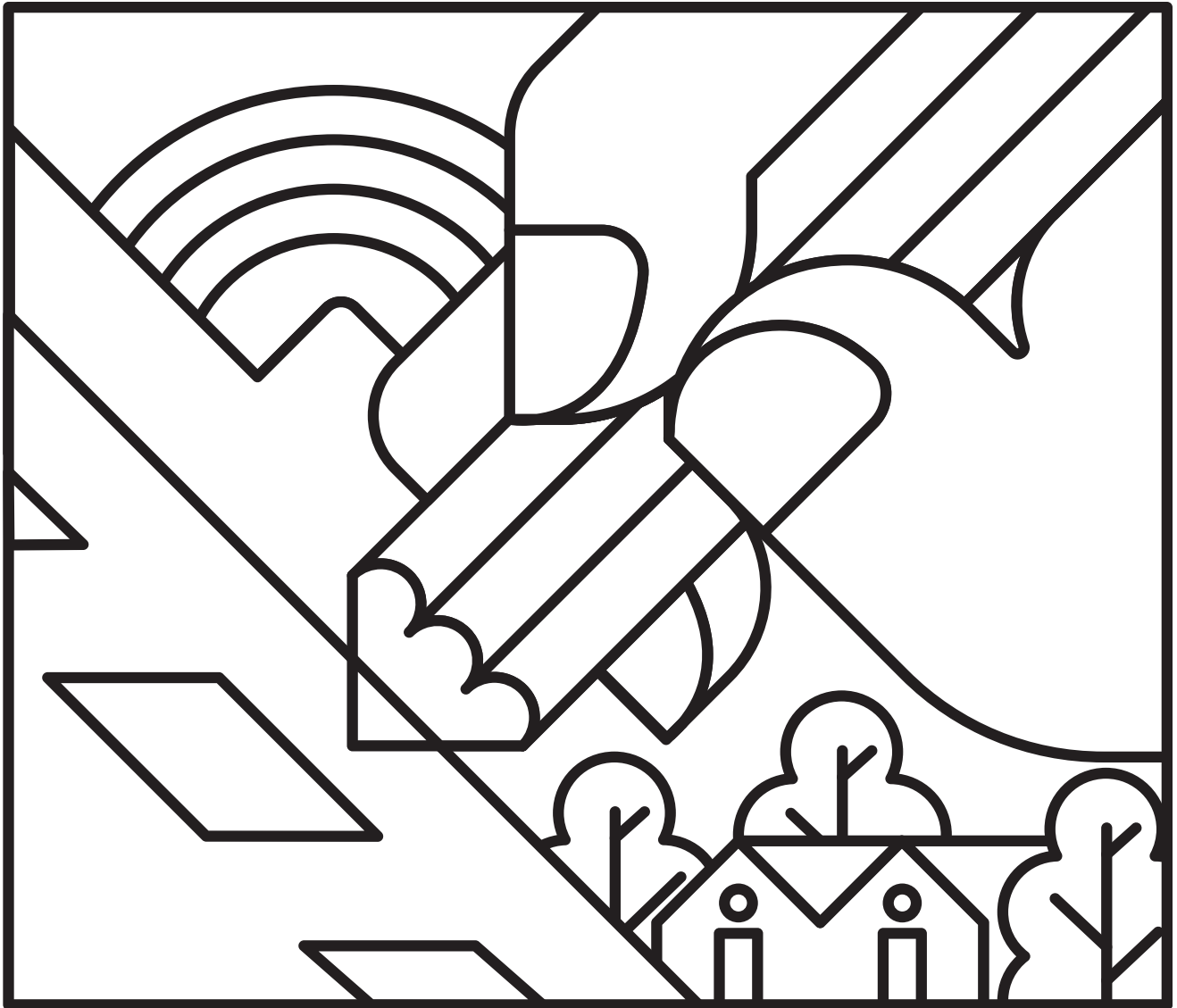
Consider the following simplified example.

Five candidates are running for three positions. Twenty people cast votes. Two of those voters are teachers. If every voter casts a vote for each of the three positions, 60 votes will be cast. The results might be 17 votes for candidate A, 13 votes for candidate B, 11 votes for candidate C, 10 votes for candidate D and 9 votes for candidate E.

Let's say that candidates B and D are well qualified. If the two teachers vote for candidate B, candidate D and (for lack of a third well-qualified candidate) candidate C, those teachers will give candidate C the two votes necessary to defeat well-qualified candidate D.

However, if the two teachers vote only for the well-qualified candidates (B and D) and do not vote for a third candidate, the results will be 17 votes for candidate A, 13 votes for candidate B, 10 votes for candidate D, 9 votes for candidate C and 9 votes for candidate E. By voting only for candidates B and D, the two teachers will ensure that those candidates are elected.

Plumping is a last resort and must be employed by a large number of voters to be effective. In most elections, it is possible to order candidates according to merit. Plumping should be used only when teachers believe that certain candidates are so outstanding that they must be elected, regardless of who else is elected, or when teachers believe that some candidates are utterly without merit. It is usually better to vote for the best of a bad lot than to plump.



The Legal Elements

Important Dates

The next municipal general election will be held on October 20, 2025.

Nominations for the general election open between January 1 and September 20, 2025.

Who Can Run for Trustee?

The following eligibility criteria are outlined in Alberta's *Local Authorities Election Act* (<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/l21>) and *Education Act* (<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/e00p3>).

Voting Eligibility, Age and Citizenship

- The candidate must be eligible to vote in the election.
- The candidate must be at least 18 years old.
- The candidate must be a Canadian citizen.

Residency

- The candidate must have resided in Alberta for at least six consecutive months immediately preceding nomination day.
- The candidate must have been a resident of the local jurisdiction and ward, if applicable, for at least six consecutive months immediately preceding nomination day.
- For school districts within city boundaries, the candidate does not need to reside in the specific ward but must live in the school district.

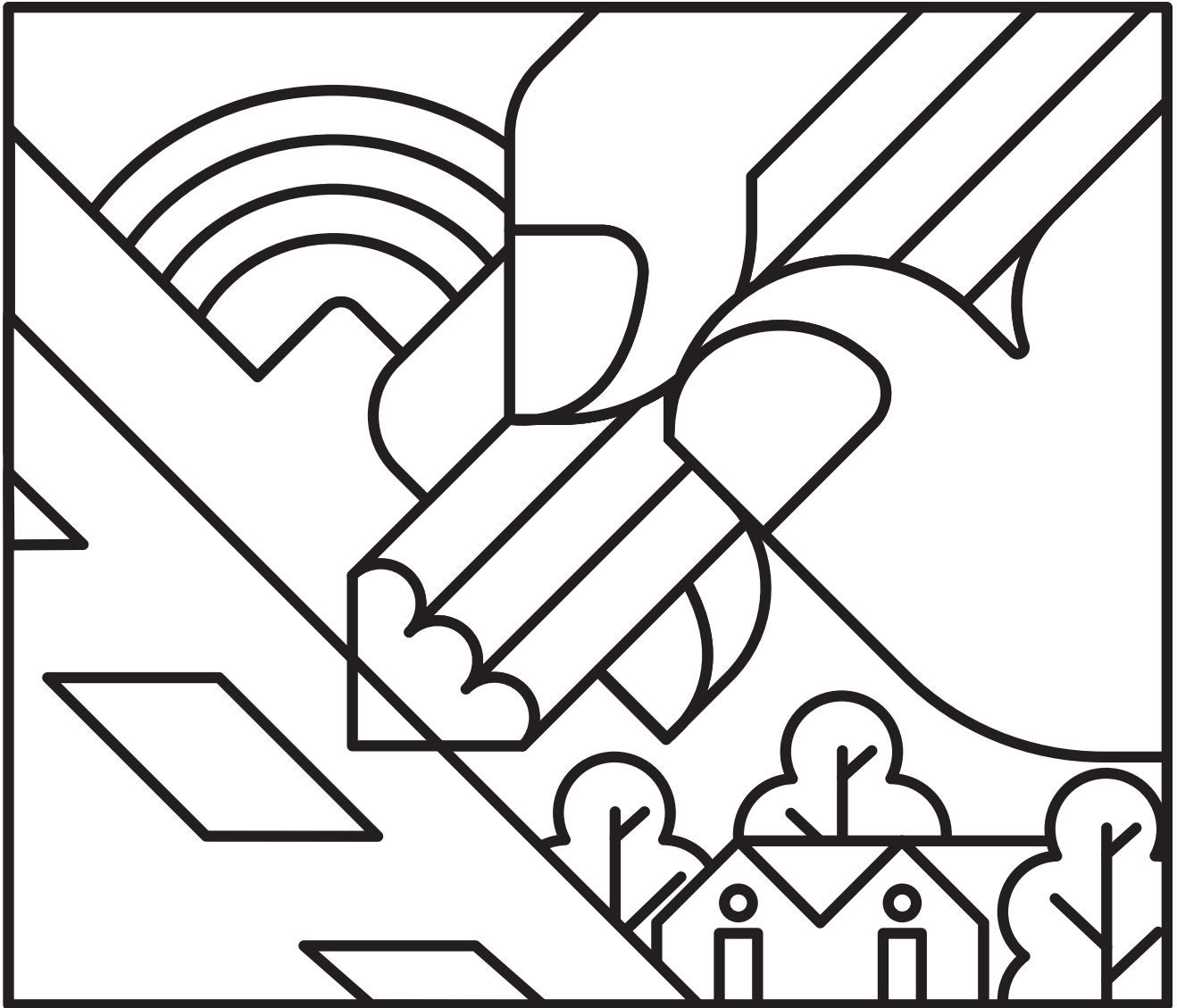
Faith Requirement for Separate School Trustees

- A candidate for separate school trustee must be of the same faith (Protestant or Roman Catholic) as those who established the separate district.

Ineligibility

The following are ineligible to run for trustee:

- An employee of the school board for which the election is to be held (including a school district or division, a charter school, or a private school), unless they take a leave of absence
- The auditor of the local jurisdiction
- Anyone convicted of an election-related offence under the *Local Authorities Election Act*, the *Election Act* or the *Canada Elections Act* in the past 10 years
- Anyone who has already been nominated for another office in the same elected authority
- A current office holder in the elected authority, unless their term is expiring or they resign 18 days or more before nomination day



The Nuts and Bolts of Evaluation

Evaluating the Board, the Trustees and the Candidates

The first step in determining the extent of your involvement in the election and your approach to that election is to evaluate the current school trustees, both individually and collectively. You may also want to evaluate potential candidates.

Consider the criteria on the next page. Add your own criteria, if you wish. For each criterion, rate your board and trustees on a scale from **1 (low) to 5 (high)**. If scores for the board are low in any area, identify which trustee or group of trustees is responsible. This evaluation will help you gain an idea of your trustees' relative abilities.

If you are unfamiliar with individual trustees, review the board's minutes, sit in on a few meetings, scan newspaper coverage, and talk to people who have worked closely with the trustees or watched them in action.

Evaluating the Board		
Criterion	Who is responsible?	Rating (1-5)
Sticks to policy decisions; leaves administrative decisions to administrator		
Plans ahead instead of reacting to crises; uses professional staff to identify potential crises		
Requests options from professional staff for policy decisions rather than acting simply as a rubber stamp		
Has a policy manual or summary		
Has reviewed policies instead of leaving them stagnant		
Addresses issues positively rather than defensively; seeks unity through cooperation rather than through scapegoating		
Presents the budget to the public in an understandable manner		
Is working toward specific goals		
Considers public sentiment before acting in new policy areas; does not depend on public apathy for its existence		
Explains education issues to the public in ordinary language; avoids jargon		

Criterion	Who is responsible?	Rating (1-5)
Is accessible to the media		
Allows time for public response rather than suddenly introducing decisions from on high; avoids surprises		
Makes major decisions in public, not at closed meetings		
Publicizes meeting times and makes minutes available to the public		
Is willing to admit that problems exist in the system		
Uses questionnaires, surveys and other feedback to gauge public concerns		
Conducts meetings in an orderly and efficient manner		
Works to achieve consensus; makes decisions on a collegial rather than on a top-down basis		
Thinks about problems rather than appealing to traditions or preconceptions		
Has reviewed wards and/or electoral subdivisions to ensure that the public is well represented on the board		
Is open to new ideas and change		

Criterion	Who is responsible?	Rating (1-5)
Attempts to work with support staff; is not openly hostile		
Works to create public confidence in the system		
Is willing to authorize a plebiscite for a special school tax levy to improve schools		
Prepares realistic budgets; is not building up a massive surplus		
Has sought to lower class sizes		
Has a coherent policy on inclusive education		
Visits schools		
Publicly defends and supports teachers		
Uses and respects teachers' consultative committees		
Listens to and acts on teachers' concerns; balances teachers' concerns with the superintendent's concerns rather than simply rubber-stamping the superintendent's position		
Negotiates fairly		
Seeks cooperation rather than confrontation with teachers		

Criterion	Who is responsible?	Rating (1-5)
Recognizes teachers with outstanding or long-term service		
Encourages the professional development of teachers; provides adequate inservice opportunities		
Does not use transfers as punishment		
Keeps school materials up to date; provides adequate funds for resource room materials		
Encourages variety in school programming		
Uses budgeted funds wisely and allocates funds in a manner that optimizes classroom conditions		
Distributes funds in a way that is clear to understand		
Total		

Evaluating a Trustee	
Criterion	Rating (1-5)
Is knowledgeable about budget restrictions and procedures	
Leaves administrative decisions to administrators	
Has clear goals for the school system	
Anticipates crises before they erupt	
Studies carefully and questions recommendations from other trustees and professional staff	
Seeks consensus among trustees rather than seeking unity by creating enemies	
Has demonstrated fairness in resolving board disputes; is willing to compromise	
Makes public appearances to explain education views	
Speaks clearly, not in jargon	
Is accessible to the media but is not a publicity hound	
Visits schools	
Talks freely with teachers	
Contributes to smooth decision making rather than creating turmoil and confusion at meetings	

Criterion	Rating (1-5)
Thinks; considers new approaches to old problems	
Takes a public stand on controversial issues; does not hide behind platitudes	
Is able to distinguish between important issues and harmless nonsense	
Has a sense of humour	
Is able to support positions with solid arguments	
Initiates proposals	
Recognizes that education is not a business	
Works well with support staff	
Does not leak confidential information	
Does not shift blame; accepts responsibility	
Is available to members of the public	
Is familiar with board policies	
Demonstrates knowledge of education issues in other jurisdictions	
Publicly defends teachers	
Is concerned with more than one policy area; is not a single-issue trustee	

Criterion	Rating (1-5)
Does not distort events, facts or statistics for individual or collective gain	
Is impartial; does not belong to any one interest group	
Makes an effort to keep in touch with constituents	
Attends all or most board meetings; assumes an active role in discussions	
Treats teachers as equals	
Promotes the values of public education, including equality and accessibility	
Is realistic and thoughtful about emerging trends in education, including the appropriate use of technology	
Total	

Evaluating a Candidate	
Criterion	Rating (1-5)
Has clear and realistic goals for the system	
Is knowledgeable about current board policies and practices	
Demonstrates an ability to work constructively with others and to achieve consensus	
Demonstrates a willingness to assume responsibility	
Plays an active role in the community	
Has been fair and honest in business dealings or work activities	
Has been available to the public during the campaign	
Speaks clearly, not in jargon	
Is familiar with local schools	
Has discussed issues privately with teachers	
Has discussed issues privately with parents	
Demonstrates an imaginative approach to problem solving	
Is able to delegate responsibility effectively	
Has proposed constructive solutions to problems rather than simply criticizing	
Has clear policies on a variety of specific issues	

Criterion	Rating (1-5)
Is a role model for students	
Is able to distinguish between important issues and trivial and faddish controversies	
Has identified specific priorities	
Has a sense of humour	
Does not shift blame	
Is able to support positions with solid arguments	
Keeps confidential conversations confidential	
Is impartial; is owned by no one	
Is concerned with more than one issue	
Does not distort facts for personal gain	
Total	

Campaigning Using Evaluations

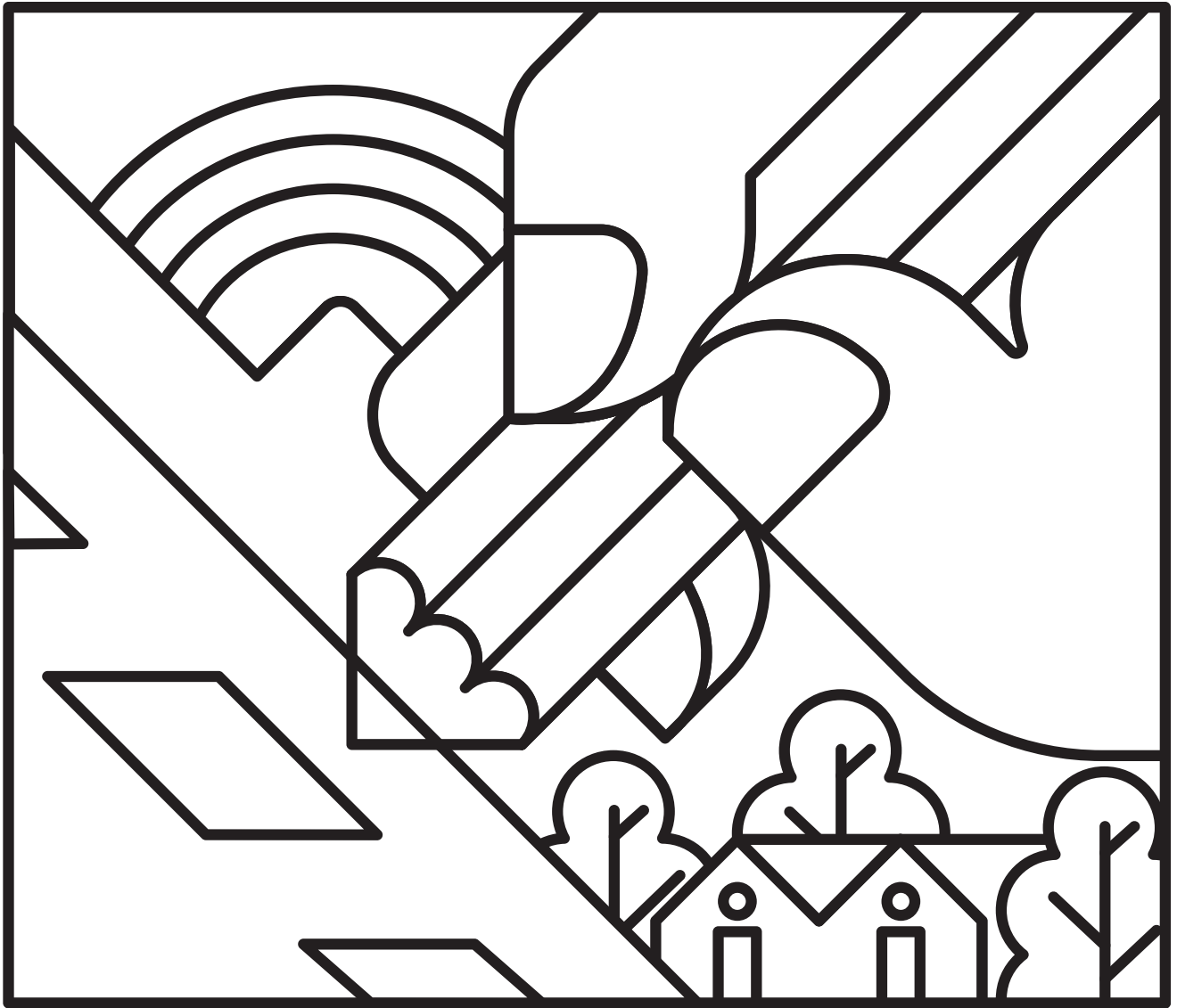
If certain trustees are creating dysfunction, consider running a campaign that emphasizes the importance of the qualities those trustees lack.

If certain trustees have done excellent work that has not been publicized, stress the value of that kind of work.

If the board as a whole has failed in its responsibilities, draw attention to the board's inaction.

You may also want to emphasize the qualities that any potential candidate for trustee should possess. For ideas, see Promoting the Evaluation of Candidates (p 46).

In any campaign based on evaluation, take care not to accuse specific people of misbehaviour. Such accusations may spawn counteraccusations or even libel suits. Bear in mind the political adage that for every enemy you make, you need to make 10 friends.



Action Plans

Teachers' and parents' involvement in school board elections has traditionally been limited to circulating questionnaires and conducting candidate forums. Both actions can be effective, but you should also consider a broader range of involvement. Your new election action plans can replace or reinforce the traditional plans.

The following action plans fall into three broad categories:

- Improving the quality of candidates for trusteeship and the quality of debate during the campaign
- Promoting a thorough evaluation of candidates
- Articulating and promoting education issues during the campaign

The action plans are designed to stimulate new approaches to electioneering and to provide ideas you can modify to suit your needs. Think of each plan as a starting point. Feel free to combine ideas from multiple plans to create an effective strategy.

Identifying and Nominating Candidates

Trustees who have not fulfilled their responsibilities or trustees who have demonstrated a poor understanding of education should face stiff challenge from well-qualified candidates. You can help identify good candidates and encourage them to run.

Purposes

- To reduce the number of trustees elected by acclamation
- To select the strongest possible challengers to incumbents who should be replaced
- To improve the calibre of candidates

Resources

People

- You will need to establish a small committee of impartial, level-headed people for evaluating current trustees and surveying the community for potential candidates.

Time

- Evaluating the current trustees will take 5–10 hours.
- Preparing a short list of potential candidates will take approximately 5 hours.
- Approaching potential candidates will take varying amounts of time.
- Begin this process early. You will need to give potential candidates time to consider running.

Money

- No money is required.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select a coordinator and form a small committee to evaluate the current trustees and identify potential candidates.
- Evaluate trustees both collectively and individually (see *The Nuts and Bolts of Evaluation* [pp 25–31]).
- Prepare a list of trustees who should be replaced.
- Review your jurisdiction's past school board election results, as well as the results of any by-elections.
- Evaluate the defeated candidates and determine whether you should encourage any of them to run again. It is generally better to seek new candidates, but there are exceptions to that rule. Consider the following questions: Was the candidate soundly defeated? Did the defeat result from a poorly organized campaign, unpopular policies or personal style? Would the candidate make a better trustee than any incumbents? If a defeated candidate has positive qualities but lost because of a poorly organized campaign, consider encouraging them to run again.

- If none of the previous candidates are a good choice, or if the incumbents were acclaimed, prepare a list of potential candidates. Select reasonably prominent citizens who have demonstrated concern about their community. Include people who have proven themselves in another elected office or who have previously served as a trustee.
- Eliminate people who are ineligible for trusteeship under the *Local Authorities Election Act* or the *Education Act*, as well as those with any strong marks against them.
- Draw up a short list of the remaining potential candidates, ordered according to desirability.
- Prepare a summary of education issues in your jurisdiction, including any issues that may arise over the next four years. This summary will prove useful when you approach potential candidates.
- List the reasons each person on your short list should run for trustee. Most candidates run because they are strongly committed to their community. Emphasize what each person can offer the community by becoming a trustee.
- Try to determine who else is planning to run for trustee by keeping your eyes peeled and your ears to the ground and by asking questions. You may not need to approach anyone to run after all. Simply encourage someone who is already thinking of running.
- Follow the above steps for each ward or electoral subdivision in your jurisdiction. In undivided jurisdictions, you will need to prepare only one short list of potential candidates.
- Talk one-on-one with the potential candidate. Review with them the state of education. Explain why you believe that they are well suited to the role of trustee.
- Emphasize their qualifications for the job. A little flattery doesn't hurt.
- Don't promise them that your local will support them in their campaign. You are speaking only for yourself or for a few concerned citizens.
- Ask them to mull over what you have said. Give them a few weeks to think about whether they want to run.
- Talk informally with friends of the potential candidates. Ask them to encourage the potential candidates to run for office. Emphasize the reasons they would make good trustees.
- Ask your own friends to encourage the potential candidates.
- Check back with the potential candidates after a few weeks. Try to secure their firm commitment to run. If any potential candidates seem unlikely to run or if they turn down your request, approach the next person on your short list. This process takes time. Begin early.

Follow-Up Activities

- Keep a copy of your short list of potential candidates for use in future elections or by-elections.
- Thank those who agree to run, regardless of whether they win or lose.

Taking Action

- Approach the people on your short list, beginning with your first choice. How you approach them is up to you, but the contact should be informal. You are not offering to help them with their campaign. You are simply asking them to run for office, because you believe that they would make a good trustee. (In jurisdictions with wards or electoral subdivisions, you can approach your first choice for each unit simultaneously. In undivided jurisdictions, you may decide to approach several potential candidates simultaneously.)

Potential Problems

- Unless you are very discreet, you may be accused of trying to elect a trustee who will serve your interests. Such an accusation would be difficult for a candidate to overcome, so maintain a low profile. You are not trying to put a mouthpiece on the board. You are simply trying to encourage a well-qualified candidate to run.

- The nomination period lasts only two hours, so you will not know definitively in advance who is going to run. You may end up persuading someone to run who is less qualified than another person who is planning to file nomination papers.
- If you encourage too many potential candidates, you risk splitting the vote and significantly reducing their chances of success.
- It is tempting to assume that former teachers would make good trustees. This is often not the case. Look for people who are impartial, fair and thoughtful rather than focusing on those with experience in education.

Alternative Actions

- Complete your research and evaluations. Then, approach potential candidates through a third party. Consider starting or working with a citizen action committee for those concerned about education, composed of teachers and parents. This committee will not necessarily adhere to your local's policy, but it can promise support to potential candidates.

Key Points

- ▶ Be discreet.
- ▶ Emphasize to potential candidates their qualifications for the job. They may not be aware how qualified they are.
- ▶ Don't promise potential candidates that your local will endorse or assist them. You are speaking only for yourself or for a few concerned citizens.
- ▶ Ask friends of the potential candidates, as well as your own friends, to encourage them to run. This will reinforce your personal request.
- ▶ Don't flood the field with well-qualified candidates. Don't risk splitting the vote.

Organizing a Candidates' Workshop

Incumbents are familiar with the school system and, therefore, have an advantage over their challengers. A candidates' workshop will give candidates the information they will need for directing education over the next four years. It will also give them a strong foundation on which to build their campaigns. Conduct a separate workshop in each jurisdiction.

Purposes

- To give all candidates a common base of facts about the school system
- To reduce distortions that emerge when candidates act on misconceptions and misinformation about public education
- To allow teachers and parents to present their views on current education issues and their roles in the system
- To expose candidates to new ideas and expand the focus of single-issue candidates
- To establish a sense of cooperation among teachers, parents and potential trustees

Resources

People

- One or two people should organize the workshop, along with one or two school board administrators. (The best way to acquire the necessary facts and meeting space is to work with school board staff.)
- A committee should be formed to research and prepare the workshop materials.

Time

- Conducting research and preparing the workshop materials will take about a month. Begin before summer vacation, since school opening in

September will consume the time of teachers, parents and the board.

- The workshop itself should be no longer than a morning or part of an afternoon. Hold the workshop on the first Saturday following nomination day.

Money

- Costs are minimal. Meeting space should be free, and speakers will be free.
- Photocopying materials and providing refreshments will cost a small amount of money.
- Costs will rise if your local decides to purchase release time for the teachers who are assigned to do research.

Facility

- Space requirements are minimal. The number of candidates is unlikely to exceed 30. In most cases, expect 10–15 candidates.
- The board should provide free meeting space.
- If the board does not cooperate, look for meeting space in a home or through local nonprofit organizations.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select a coordinator and form a committee to undertake research and prepare workshop materials.
- Determine which aspects of the school system to cover. Possible topics include the budgetary process, class size and configuration, inclusive education, assessment practices, school safety, high school completion, administrative structure, enrolment, school closures, school transportation, community relations programs, negotiations, and staffing. Emphasize the issues that you want to promote during the campaign.

- Approach the board about conducting a joint workshop. Establish a mutual agenda and areas of responsibility. Ask that the information be kept factual and unbiased.
- Select a date for the workshop. The first Saturday following nomination day is best.
- Select a site for the workshop. While neutral territory is appealing, the board will have the best meeting facilities and equipment. Don't select a large room. There will probably be no more than 15 candidates.
- Assign research responsibilities and deadlines. Allow time for proofreading and photocopying materials.
- Prepare background materials to give candidates an overview of the topics. Make sure the materials are brief but thought-provoking.
- Invite candidates to the workshop and explain the purpose of the workshop.
- Select a moderator.
- Assign speaking responsibilities. In most cases, the person who prepared the research should present it.
- Find a teacher or parent who is willing to share their viewpoint to conclude the workshop.
- Schedule time for discussion. Candidates will probably have lots of questions.
- Arrange for refreshments to be provided. Include nutritious snacks.

Taking Action

- Have your materials ready at least a day before the workshop. If your local or the board is concerned about bias, review each other's materials.
- Check audiovisual equipment before the workshop to ensure that it works properly.
- Have on hand a list of the candidates expected to attend the workshop.
- Greet candidates as they arrive. Give them name tags and materials.

- Begin the workshop by asking candidates to introduce themselves.
- Present the workshop materials.
- Conclude the workshop with a teacher's or a parent's viewpoint.
- Engage in discussion and answer candidates' questions.

Follow-Up Activities

- Thank the speakers and the candidates via e-mail. Personalize each e-mail by commenting on a specific aspect of that person's contribution to the workshop.
- Evaluate the workshop's effectiveness in educating the candidates.
- Use your research materials as the basis for news releases or ads.
- Let teachers and parents know what happened at the workshop.

Potential Problems

- The board may refuse to cooperate and may block your research efforts. If this happens, organize the workshop alone. Most of the material you will need is publicly available.
- Incumbents may challenge your facts and figures or condemn your views. The moderator should have the ability to curtail highly opinionated or inflammatory comments. The purpose of the workshop is to educate, not to convince or debate.

Key Points

- ▶ Start organizing the workshop before summer vacation. You won't have time in September.
- ▶ Emphasize the workshop's educational purpose.
- ▶ Schedule the workshop as early as possible in the campaign. Aim for the first Saturday after nomination day.

Conducting a Candidates' Tour of Schools

Too often, voters elect trustees who are not informed about local schools. Those candidates gain popularity by repeating widely accepted myths about public education. Conduct a tour of schools to give candidates a first-hand view of the system in action as they ride school buses, examine facilities and attend classes.

Purposes

- To expose candidates to the environment in which teachers and students work
- To allow candidates to meet teachers and students and discuss education issues
- To stimulate new interests in single-issue candidates
- To dispel myths about budgetary frills in education and schools
- To demonstrate teachers' interest in the election

Resources

People

- A tour coordinator and a committee will be needed to organize the itinerary and work with the board. (Board cooperation is essential as the tour will take place on its property.)
- Teachers from each school on the itinerary should sit on the committee.

Time

- Depending on the size of the jurisdiction, the tour may be as short as two hours or as long as one whole school day.
- Preparing for the tour will require no longer than a month. Begin before September.

Money

- Costs could include chartering a school bus (where numbers warrant).
- You may need to provide lunch for the candidates. Consider asking them to bring a bag lunch and eat with students.
- The tour coordinator may require release time.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select a tour coordinator and establish a small committee.
- Select a date for the tour. The tour should follow close on the heels of nomination day.
- Determine what candidates should see during the tour. Select a cross-section of schools—well-equipped and poorly equipped schools, large and small schools, urban and rural schools.
- Set the itinerary. Scheduled stops should allow time for discussion between candidates, teachers and students. Ensure that each school is willing to take part in the tour and is committed to the project.
- Approach the board with your itinerary. If possible, approach the board's secretary rather than the trustees. The board must approve access to schools and school buses, as well as release time.
- Research the local school system. Each school visit should focus on a single issue relevant to the school system. Prepare a fact sheet to distribute at each school.
- Schedule minor events at each school to occur during the tour. Don't schedule special events

(such as basketball games or speeches). The purpose of the tour is to show candidates what schools are like on an ordinary day.

- Personally invite candidates to the tour immediately after the close of nominations. Get their firm commitments to attend. Let your hosts know how many people to expect.
- Keep the tour group small. If the group is too large, not everyone will be able to see or hear. Consider conducting two successive tours or two simultaneous tours.
- Invite the media. They will get good stories, and you will get positive coverage.
- Arrange photo opportunities. Scout around for interesting settings ahead of time. Encourage the media to use them.
- Inform teachers well in advance that you are coming. Explain why you are conducting the tour. Remind them a day or two before the tour.
- Consider conducting a trial run to ensure that the logistics work. Make sure that the schedule allows time for bathroom breaks, refreshments and lunch.

Taking Action

- Meet candidates at a prearranged spot. Or have a school bus pick them up at home early in the morning.
- Distribute a name tag to each participant.
- Send someone ahead to scout out the tour route in order to ensure readiness, avoid last-minute problems and double-check details.
- Let candidates know something about each school before you visit. Note the problems, the achievements and the issues specific to that school.
- Inform candidates of the length of each stop.
- Stick to your schedule. Eliminate activities if necessary.
- Review what was seen at each school and how it relates to teaching and learning. Throughout the

tour, promote teachers' concerns, but don't preach. Show.

- Take photos to accompany news releases and to include in your newsletter.
- Thank your hosts as you go.
- End the tour at the offices of the board. Discuss the day with the candidates. Consider holding a news conference or a reception for participants.
- Make sure to return candidates to their homes or to the original meeting place.

Follow-Up Activities

- Write thank-you letters to all the school hosts.
- Issue a news release, including photos, that summarizes the tour and the candidates' reactions to what they saw.

Potential Problems

- The board may choose not to cooperate, arguing that a tour would disrupt classes. Considering organizing an abbreviated tour on a Saturday. You may wish to publicize the board's lack of cooperation, depending on your relationship with the board and its reasons for not cooperating.

Key Points

- ▶ Seek the board's cooperation before you undertake extensive planning of the tour.
- ▶ Work out the logistics well in advance. Begin before September.
- ▶ Focus on a specific education issue at each stop on the tour.
- ▶ Invite the media on the tour.

Establishing a Straight-Facts Committee

Incumbents have the advantage of having access to hard data on the local school system. By establishing a straight-facts committee, you can minimize that advantage. Compile basic facts about the school system and research specific questions. Then, make that information available to candidates and to the public.

Purposes

- To help ensure that all candidates are on a level playing field by giving them equal access to factual information
- To illustrate teachers' and parents' desire for elections to be run and decided based on issues, not emotions
- To promote cooperation between teachers, parents and potential trustees
- To draw together those interested in public education

Resources

People

- A core group of three to five people can undertake the basic research.
- Board administrators (subject to the board's approval) or other groups or individuals who have demonstrated an interest in public education and have research experience can assist.

Time

- The basic research will take about 20 hours.
- Fulfilling candidates' requests for information will take additional time.

Money

- Costs are minimal. One or two days of release time may be required, depending on the board's willingness to cooperate.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select a research coordinator.
- Establish a research committee. Bring in assistants from outside your local, if desirable. Many forms of election action (such as organizing a candidates' workshop and conducting a candidates' tour of schools) require a research committee. Consider using the same core research committee for all.
- Identify key areas of research. Topics should include the budgetary process, class size and configuration, inclusive education, assessment practices, and school closures. Make your priority concerns your priority areas of research.
- Predetermine the depth of your research. Don't overextend yourself. Limit yourself to one or two pages per topic. Use point form.
- Approach the board for assistance in compiling facts. Explain the purpose of your research. Indicate that your role is nonpartisan.
- Arrange your material so that it can be readily absorbed. Don't provide more detail than candidates will need or the public will understand. Use visual devices (such as charts and graphs) wherever possible.

- Prepare a short letter to distribute to candidates. Outline your areas of research. Let them know that more-detailed research is available, as time permits. Don't promise candidates more than you can deliver.

Taking Action

- Send the letter to all candidates.
- When candidates request more information, ask them how much detail they want. Set realistic deadlines.
- If you think you can't meet a deadline, let candidates know immediately. Don't let them down at the last minute.
- Always identify the source of your information.
- Stick to the facts. Don't editorialize or write speeches.

Follow-Up Activities

- Keep your research. You may need it for other action plans or for future elections or by-elections.
- Send thank-you letters to those who provided the research committee with information.

Potential Problems

- Candidates may overload you with impossible or trivial requests for information. Tell them that your time is limited and that you will deal only with serious issues.
- The board may refuse to provide you with information. You may want to publicize that refusal. Carefully consider the potential consequences of such publicity.

Key Points

- ▶ Prepare basic research before the campaign gets under way. Stick to the facts.
- ▶ Check with the board secretary to determine the board's willingness to cooperate.
- ▶ Let candidates know early in their campaigns that your services are available.
- ▶ Don't accept assignments that you can't complete on time.

Publicizing the Board's Record

Most trustees will run for re-election. They will usually be re-elected on name recognition alone. Publicizing the board's budgets, priorities and major decisions is a nonpartisan way to help teachers, parents and the public determine who should be re-elected.

Purposes

- To refresh teachers', parents' and the public's memory with regard to the board's actions
- To counter campaigns based on hysteria, fads or myths
- To identify trustees who have demonstrated initiative or trustees who have obstructed change
- To stimulate public discussion about education issues
- To make new trustees aware that teachers and parents will be monitoring them and holding them accountable

Resources

People

- A handful of people will be needed to research, summarize and publicize the board's actions. Include someone with communications experience.

Time

- Research could take up to 40 hours, depending on the size of the board, how detailed its minutes are and whether news clippings are available.
- Research should be completed before summer break and be made available by September 1.
- Final ad copy must be ready by mid-September for inclusion in weekly newspapers.

Money

- Advertising rates vary widely.
- If you don't distribute your research externally, the only costs will be those associated with printing fact sheets or a newsletter.
- Release time may be required for the researchers.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select a research coordinator, assistant researchers and a graphic designer.
- Draw up a list of people you want to distribute the information to. Decide if you want to include only teachers or also parents and the public.
- Identify the issues and board decisions you want to highlight. Controversial decisions may be less important than others. For example, if trustees voted against positions they endorsed publicly, highlight those inconsistencies. If the system is cutting staff while accumulating a surplus, highlight that. If you decide to distribute the information only to teachers, focus on board decisions related to teachers (such as settlements, staff relations and transfers). If you include parents and the public, focus on more-general issues (such as board-community relations, budgetary allocations, class size and configuration, school transportation, school closures, and staff cuts).
- Research board publications, local newsletters, meeting minutes, newspapers and provincial statistics.
- Double-check your research. Don't assume anything. Don't print anything that you merely suspect.

- Present your material concisely. Use point form, charts and graphs.
- Present your material objectively. Don't make inflammatory statements or attack particular trustees.
- Print the facts, but print only those that make your point.
- Organize your material according to issue.
- Plan to run several ads on several issues over a two-month period. You don't have to reveal all the information at once.
- Assess the impact of the ad or fact sheet before you print it. If candidates running against incumbents are worse than the incumbents themselves, you don't want to hurt the incumbents' chances of re-election.
- If you fear reprisal from trustees, establish or work with an existing citizen action committee that will help with the research and put its name on the ads.
- Complete your research by the end of May so you can distribute it in September.

Taking Action

- Circulate copies of your fact sheets to everyone in your group.
- Prepare copies of the fact sheets for the media. Determine whether newspapers and radio stations are interested in running stories based on your material. If they aren't, circulate the material by writing news releases or condense the material for ads.
- Run a sequence of ads in newspapers or on radio stations. Start early.
- Make researchers available to journalists who want to follow up on any of the fact sheets.

Follow-Up Activities

- Keep an ongoing record of the board's actions for the next election. Monitor board meetings. Record trustees' votes.

Potential Problems

- If you don't present your material objectively, incumbents may become hostile. Even objective material can arouse their hostility. Trustees who have missed meetings, contradicted themselves or behaved inappropriately will not want their record publicized.

Key Points

- ▶ Ensure that your research is scrupulously accurate. Double-check your facts.
- ▶ Present only facts and be objective. Don't attack particular trustees. Let their record speak for itself.
- ▶ Maintain an ongoing record of the board's actions after the election.

Promoting the Evaluation of Candidates

Incumbents and challengers are applying for a job when they run for trustee. Unfortunately, voters often evaluate candidates based on simplistic or inappropriate criteria. Promoting the qualifications trustees should have gives voters a solid basis for evaluating candidates. You can also distribute evaluation forms at forums or to teachers and parents.

Purposes

- To increase public awareness of the demands of trusteeship
- To improve voters' decision-making abilities
- To get teachers and parents thinking critically about candidates
- To counter campaigns based on image
- To demonstrate teachers' and parents' desire to elect well-qualified candidates

Resources

People

- A coordinator and a small committee are required. Include people with communications or advertising experience.

Time

- Preparing the ads and brochures will take about 20 hours.
- Material should be distributed internally within 10 days of nomination day.

Money

- Costs will vary, depending on advertising and printing expenses. Plan to run ads more than once during the campaign.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Strike a committee to identify the desirable qualities in trustees and to prepare ads and brochures. Committee members should be people with calm, even judgment, as well as an imaginative approach to publicity.
- Evaluate the current board to determine whether it includes trustees whose behaviour, attitudes or lack of knowledge has damaged board–community relations over the past three years. For evaluation criteria, see *The Nuts and Bolts of Evaluation* (pp 25–31). Emphasize that the qualities these trustees lack are essential to good trusteeship.
- Evaluate individual trustees and candidates.
- Check local publication deadlines. Plan to run your ads several times before election day to reinforce the theme of accountability and evaluation.
- Check with local newspaper editors and radio stations. They may be willing to run some of your evaluation criteria as editorials or public service announcements. Or they may provide free advertising space.
- Arrange for the printing of your brochure. Printers need notice to schedule your print run.

Taking Action

- Prepare internal and external ads that focus on the qualities desirable in trustees. Prepare separate ads for the board and for individual trustees and candidates.
- Construct a simple chart that cross-indexes candidates and desirable qualities. Introduce the chart with a catchy phrase. Let readers fill out the chart. Even if they don't actually complete it, they will at least consider the qualities listed.

- Don't overload the public with ideas. It is better to run four short ads with a few criteria each than to run one ad with 12 criteria.
- Create ads and brochures with maximum visual impact.
- Don't use too many words and long sentences. State the desirable qualities. Wrap up with a catchy phrase. Don't belabour your point.
- Proofread your copy before delivering it to the newspaper or the printer. Keep it clean and professional.
- Identify your group as the sponsor of the ad or brochure.
- Secure a prominent location in the newspaper for your ad. There is no point in preparing the ad if no one will see it.
- Arrange for a special brochure drop, if necessary. Teachers and parents need criteria for evaluating candidates as early in the campaign as possible.

Follow-Up Activities

- Evaluate the new board after the election. Compare that evaluation with the evaluation of the former board. Determine whether you have gained anything.
- Keep copies of your ads. You may want to use them again in the next election or adapt them for by-elections.

Potential Problems

- Your evaluation criteria may be too vague and general. See *The Nuts and Bolts of Evaluation* (pp 25–31) for appropriate and effective criteria.
- Teachers and parents may complain that they have no basis for judging candidates' qualifications. Consider supplementing your evaluation with a bulletin board, a questionnaire, a special election newsletter or a candidate forum.

Alternative Actions

- Prepare evaluation forms for attendees at candidate forums. Distribute them at the door.

- Have a research committee complete the evaluation forms. Distribute the results to teachers and parents. This approach requires extreme care and scrupulous impartiality.
- Prepare a large evaluation chart. Distribute the chart to each school in your jurisdiction. Encourage teachers and parents to complete charts for the candidates, the incumbents and the board as a whole.

Key Points

- ▶ Double-check advertising and printing deadlines. Keep those deadlines in mind.
- ▶ Don't wait until the last minute to lay out your ad or brochure. Leave yourself time to reconsider and redesign your copy.
- ▶ Run several short ads rather than one long ad.
- ▶ Keep your copy clean and professional.
- ▶ Identify your group as the sponsor of the ad or brochure.

Promoting Individual Partisan Involvement Through Election Bulletin Boards

Teachers and parents often cast ballots without any real knowledge of the candidates and their platforms. Using the school bulletin board to post election information can help create a more-informed teacher and parent electorate.

Purposes

- To increase teachers' and parents' awareness of the election during the four-week campaign period
- To provide teachers and parents with information on the candidates and their platforms
- To promote discussion about election issues
- To help unify the teacher and parent vote

Resources

People

- A coordinator will be needed for encouraging school administrators to set aside space on their bulletin boards for election information.
- A few assistants will be needed for contacting candidates and preparing local notices about the election.

Time

- Between 15 minutes and 1 hour will be required, depending on the size of your jurisdiction and the number of candidates.

Money

- No money is needed, unless you mail campaign literature to schools.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select a coordinator and one or two assistants.
- Contact the board to determine whether its regulations allow you to post campaign literature on school property.
- Decide whether to allow candidates to distribute their campaign literature directly to schools.
- Prepare a list of the schools in your jurisdiction. Include addresses and the names of school administrators. Prepare enough copies for all the candidates.
- Prepare a short speech or brochure for school administrators that outlines the importance of the election and explains the purpose of an election bulletin board. Design the brochure so that it grabs their attention.
- Prepare materials for the election bulletin board. Materials could include a candidate evaluation chart (see *Promoting the Evaluation of Candidates* [pp 46–47]) or a notice of voter registration procedures.

Taking Action

- Contact school administrators to highlight the importance of an election bulletin board. Arrange to send them your brochure.
- Obtain the names of all the candidates and their contact information as soon as nominations close. Let the candidates know that they are welcome to distribute their campaign literature to schools. Arrange to supply them with copies of the school list.

- Invite candidates to prepare other special materials. They could provide materials urging teachers and parents to become involved in their campaigns or materials explaining why teachers and parents should vote for them.

Follow-Up Activities

- Ask school administrators to deposit their bulletin board materials with the coordinator after the election. Keep the materials on file to assist you in organizing future campaigns.
- Forward copies of the materials to the ATA. The ATA will include them in a file of sample campaign literature for future use.

Potential Problems

- School bulletin board space is limited, particularly in September. Make a special effort to convince school administrators of the importance of stimulating discussion about the election and the candidates. If no space is available, set up an election corner for campaign literature and other election information. The important thing is to place the information where teachers and parents will see it.
- The board's regulations may not allow posting campaign literature on school property.
- Using school bulletin board space for election information may be seen as partisan activity. Work from a demonstrable position of nonpartisanship. Ensure that all candidates are equally represented. Avoid any evaluation of the candidates. Maintain a clear purpose of encouraging individual participation in the election.

Alternative Actions

- Have the coordinator and the assistants collect and distribute the campaign literature themselves. This will speed up its arrival in schools and allow more time for teachers and parents to get involved in candidates' campaigns.
- Establish an election corner in each school. Invite teachers and parents to drop off campaign literature.

- Invite candidates to distribute letters to teachers and parents, soliciting assistance or funds or simply outlining their platforms. No space will be required, and the letters will promote discussion about election issues.

Key Points

- ▶ Determine whether the board will allow you to post campaign literature in its schools. (You may want to post the literature as ATA information.)
- ▶ Ensure that the literature arrives in schools as early in the campaign as possible.
- ▶ Collect bulletin board materials at the end of the election. Forward copies to the ATA.

Preparing a Special Election Newsletter

A special election newsletter is an effective way to increase teachers' and parents' interest in the election and make them aware of candidates' platforms. By promoting discussion about election issues, a newsletter can help unify the teacher and parent vote.

Purposes

- To stimulate teachers' and parents' interest in the election
- To promote discussion about candidates and issues
- To provide information on poll locations and voting hours
- To present candidates' views on education issues
- To relay information about the local government structure
- To increase teachers' and parents' awareness of the election's relevance to teaching and learning conditions

Resources

People

- A coordinator with communications experience should be assisted by a small committee of researchers and writers.

Time

- The research will consume 10–40 hours, depending on the newsletter's length and the depth of its election coverage.
- Most of the newsletter can be prepared before the end of June.
- If the newsletter contains a questionnaire, distribute it to teachers and parents no more than 10 days after nomination day. Otherwise, distribute it approximately 10 days before election day.

Money

- Costs are minimal, equalling or slightly exceeding the costs normally associated with producing a newsletter.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Appoint a coordinator.
- Strike a small committee of researchers and writers to assist the coordinator. Choose people knowledgeable about education issues, local government and local history.
- Determine whether the newsletter will include a questionnaire (see *Using Questionnaires Effectively* [pp 52–55]).
- Determine the desired length and content of the newsletter. The newsletter could include coverage of candidate forums, interviews with candidates, a review of the board's activities, a map of poll locations, voting hours, an explanation of the local government's structure, stories about your election activities, notices encouraging teachers and parents to vote, an evaluation of teachers' and parents' potential impact on local elections, a trustee qualifications chart, or the results of past elections and by-elections.
- Assign research and writing responsibilities.
- Establish deadlines for submission. Allow sufficient time for editing.
- Remain objective. Confine opinions to editorial columns.
- Keep the articles short and light.

- Maintain a local focus. Remember that the newsletter is for teachers and parents.
- Lay out as much of the copy as possible before the summer break. Time will be limited in September.
- Leave a lot of white space. Incorporate maps, charts and photographs.
- Give bylines to writers, researchers and photographers.
- Arrange for the newsletter to be professionally printed, if you can afford it. A professional printing job will help ensure that the newsletter is widely read.

Taking Action

- If your newsletter contains a questionnaire, make sure to distribute it by the end of the week following the close of nominations.
- Consider establishing a special distribution network to ensure that your newsletter reaches teachers and parents as soon as possible. If it arrives too late, your efforts will be wasted.

Follow-Up Activities

- Keep your research and the newsletter on file for future use.
- Send thank-you letters to people who provided information for the newsletter. Include a copy of the newsletter.
- Solicit feedback from teachers and parents. Make a list of their comments and recommendations. Attach the list to the copy of the newsletter that you store.

Potential Problems

- Printers may not be willing to take on rush jobs. Make arrangements well in advance.
- Missed deadlines will leave gaps in the newsletter. Check in with your writers to ensure that they complete their assignments on time.

Key Points

- ▶ Start the research and writing as early as possible.
Aim to complete most of it by the end of June.
- ▶ Stick to the facts. Don't endorse candidates. Let them speak for themselves.
- ▶ Keep the newsletter clean and professional.

Using Questionnaires Effectively

Candidates' campaigns are designed to persuade voters through emotional appeals on one or two issues rather than through a clear stand on a variety of issues. Questionnaires help voters determine candidates' views in several policy areas. Local newspapers often prepare and publish questionnaires. Unfortunately, those questionnaires are often so vague that they don't help voters distinguish clearly between candidates based on their responses. You can create questionnaires that deal with issues of particular interest to teachers and parents.

Purposes

- To determine candidates' general attitudes toward teachers, parents and schools
- To determine candidates' specific views and intentions
- To provide teachers and parents with a basis for deciding how to vote
- To provide teachers and parents with a basis for deciding whether they will work on a candidate's campaign

Resources

People

- A coordinator and two or three assistants will be required to draft questions and distribute the responses.
- A researcher will be required if the questions are based on details of the board's actions over the last three years.

Time

- Developing the questionnaire and compiling the responses will take four or five evenings.
- The questionnaire should be distributed to candidates immediately following the close of nominations.

- Candidates should be asked to return the questionnaire within 5 days so that their responses can be shared with teachers and parents within 10 days of nomination day.

Money

- Costs are minimal. The only cost is printing candidates' responses for distribution to teachers and parents.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select a coordinator and assistants. Be sure to include someone with communications experience.
- Identify teachers' and parents' priorities for the next four years.
- Prepare a lengthy list of questions based on those priorities. Then, pare down the list to no more than 10 questions. If you ask too many questions, no one will bother to read the responses.
- Ensure that most of the questions are specific. General questions invite platitudinous answers. That makes it difficult for voters to distinguish between candidates based on their views.
- Test your questions on teachers and parents. Ask them to pretend they are candidates. Do your questions provide too much scope for platitudes? Do they provide too little scope for clear answers?
- Start preparing an editorial on the candidates' responses for inclusion in your special election newsletter or brochure. Design and lay out the copy well in advance. The sooner teachers and parents read the responses, the sooner they can start working on their preferred candidate's campaign. Incorporate candidates' photographs in the newsletter, if possible.

- Prepare the questions and instructions for candidates before nomination day. Specify the word limit and the deadline for responses. Emphasize the consequences of not responding. (For example, your newsletter will leave white space beneath the candidate's name and will note the candidate's failure to respond.) Don't threaten candidates. Simply inform them of the rules.
- Determine how you will deal with submissions that are too long. Some candidates will likely exceed your word limit.

Taking Action

- Send the questions and instructions to candidates once nominations have closed. Alternatively, ask teachers and parents to go to the nomination office and distribute the questionnaires as candidates file their nomination papers.
- Discuss the questionnaire with candidates and explain its purpose. Ask each candidate to supply a brief biography and a photograph.
- Contact all candidates a day or two before the questionnaire is due to remind them of the deadline.
- Edit candidates' responses for spelling and grammar. Don't alter the content. If you must edit for length, do not alter the primary intent or message.
- Print the candidates' responses and distribute them immediately to teachers and parents. Include a letter encouraging teachers and parents to participate in candidates' campaigns. The sooner the responses are distributed to teachers and parents, the more time they will have to consider and discuss the candidates.

Follow-Up Activities

- Send thank-you letters to candidates who responded to the questionnaire. Include a copy of your newsletter or brochure.
- Forward a copy of your newsletter or brochure to the ATA so that other groups can adapt it for future elections.

Potential Problems

- Some candidates may refuse to complete the questionnaire. They may think that the questions are too specific or biased, or they may not find the effort worthwhile, given that the responses will be distributed only to teachers and parents. Don't argue with those candidates. Simply record their objections in the space you've allotted for them in your newsletter or brochure.

Alternative Actions

- Prepare questions that deal with issues of interest to teachers, parents and the public. Distribute the responses to teachers, parents and local newspapers. If newspapers decide not to run the responses, consider buying advertising space. The deadline for responses can be extended if the responses are publicized through the media.
- Distribute the responses without encouraging teachers and parents to become involved in candidates' campaigns.
- Conduct one-on-one interviews with the candidates. Report their views in your special election newsletter. This approach requires scrupulous objectivity and a great deal more time than a traditional questionnaire.

Key Points

- ▶ Ensure that your questions are reasonably specific.
- ▶ Have the questions ready for distribution to the candidates on nomination day.
- ▶ Share the candidates' responses with teachers and parents within 10 days of nomination day.

Tips for Creating Questionnaires

Types of Questions

+ Open-Ended, General Questions

These questions tend to elicit warm platitudes and vacuous statements that offend no one.

Examples

- + Do you think teachers are doing a good job?
- + Why are you running for trustee?

+ Open-Ended, Specific Questions

These questions allow candidates room to manoeuvre but demand a specific response.

Examples

- + What are your top-three priorities for change in the jurisdiction next year?
- + How can we educate all children well?

+ Yes-No Questions

These questions force candidates to take a stand. Some candidates will still attempt to sit on the fence. To avoid this, place Yes/No after each question.

Examples

- + Should teachers have the right to strike? Yes/No
- + Should class sizes be reduced? Yes/No

+ Forced-Choice Questions

These questions preclude wavering by limiting the options for response. Additional space can be provided for qualification and comments.

Examples

- + Teachers need more preparation time:
 - (a) Strongly agree
 - (b) Agree
 - (c) Neither agree nor disagree
 - (d) Disagree
 - (e) Strongly disagree

- + Busing distances in the jurisdiction are
 - (a) too long,
 - (b) about right or
 - (c) too short.

Structure of Questionnaires

- Consider including different types of questions in your questionnaire (for example, several yes-no and forced-choice questions and one or two open-ended questions).
- Envision the layout of the questionnaire when preparing your questions. If it looks like too much to read, readers won't read any of it.
- Ask candidates why teachers and parents should vote for them or work on their campaign.
- Base your questions on issues on which your local has clear policy. This will help teachers and parents evaluate candidates. Include a chart of candidates' responses that indicates whether the responses are consistent or inconsistent with each policy.

Sample Questions

The following sample questions are open-ended questions. You can rewrite them as yes-no or forced-choice questions, if desired.

- + Which three areas of education require immediate action in this jurisdiction? What are your priorities for the coming year?
- + Should principals be removed from the teachers' bargaining unit? Do you see principals as teachers or managers?
- + Should teachers have the right to strike?
- + Would you vote so as to force a strike rather than include a clause on class size or preparation time in teachers' collective agreement?
- + Do you favour a limit on class size? Would you include such a limit in teachers' collective agreement?
- + Do you think that the average class size in the jurisdiction should be reduced?

- + Do you favour a subsidized school lunch program?
- + Do you support the sale of junk food in schools?
- + Should students and teachers have a dress code?
- + Do schools have adequate facilities? If not, what improvements need to be made?
- + Should the board make a strong effort to publicize its decisions?
- + Should all students with diverse needs be integrated into regular classrooms?
- + Does the board provide adequate inservice training to teachers?
- + Should the electoral system be revamped? Should a ward system be introduced? Should the boundaries of electoral subdivisions be redrawn?
- + Do school libraries receive an adequate portion of the local education budget? Are school libraries adequately stocked?
- + Are local program options adequate? Should the number of junior high school options be increased, maintained or decreased? What about high school options?
- + Are schools' physical education programs adequate?
- + Should schools cut back on sex education, counselling and other values-related programs and services?
- + Do you think the local school system has too many frills? What are those frills?
- + Do you favour the incorporation of private schools within public school authorities?
- + Which learning and working conditions do you deem negotiable? Which do you deem nonnegotiable?
- + Which issues do you believe the board should discuss in camera (privately)?
- + Should negotiations with local teachers occur at the local level or the regional level?
- + Do you think teachers should be hired on five-year contracts?
- + Do teachers in the school system have adequate preparation time? Would you negotiate improvements to their preparation time?
- + Does the school system provide adequately for teachers' professional development? If not, what improvements should be made?
- + Are student achievement levels adequate in the school system?
- + Should student test results be used to evaluate teachers?
- + Should the business community be more involved in the school system?
- + Do you support school board funding of full-day kindergarten programs for at-risk students?
- + To what extent should the process of negotiations between the school board and its employee groups be reported publicly?
- + What role should the school board take in discouraging bullying and promoting safe and caring schools?
- + Should the school board support specific programs to promote inclusion and support for sexual and gender minority students?

Conducting Candidate Forums

Candidate forums draw together citizens interested in hearing candidates' views. In urban areas, forums are poorly attended and tend to attract only people who are already committed to specific candidates. In rural areas, the turnout is higher, enabling voters to get a better understanding of candidates' positions. If teachers and parents wish to question candidates closely, consider organizing an invitation-only candidate forum.

Purposes

- To give teachers, parents and the public a first-hand view of candidates
- To facilitate the exchange of opposing points of view
- To provide teachers, parents and the public with an opportunity to question candidates
- To promote media coverage of education issues
- To encourage teachers, parents and the public to vote

Resources

People

- A coordinator and a committee will be required to develop the agenda, select the facility and publicize the forum. The size of the jurisdiction will determine the size of the committee. Coordination with other committees may be possible.

Time

- One month should be sufficient time to organize the forum.
- A two- or three-hour forum should be scheduled for a weekday evening long enough before election day to allow for media coverage.

Money

- Costs will vary, depending on the facility and whether another group cosponsors the forum.
- Other expenses will include publicity, refreshments and decorations.

Facility

- Determine how many people can be expected to attend the forum, based on attendance at previous forums. It's better to secure a facility a little on the small side than one that is too large.
- Determine whether the facility allows election placards.
- Ensure that the facility is accessible to people with disabilities.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select a coordinator and a committee.
- Review the number of candidates in previous elections. If the number of candidates is large, a forum may be unmanageable.
- Prepare a short list of organizations that may be interested in cosponsoring the forum (such as chambers of commerce, farmers' associations, school council associations and taxpayers' associations). Will such sponsorship impede your ability to ask certain questions? If so, don't seek a cosponsor. Otherwise, approach the organizations on your short list.
- Select a date and time for the forum. Estimate attendance figures. Check the availability of potential facilities. Ensure that no other major community events are scheduled for that evening.

- Prepare publicity materials. Radio stations will generally publicize the forum as a public service announcement. Newspaper editors may donate space. Place posters in busy locations (such as shopping malls) and distribute them to schools. Connect the forum to the public's immediate interests. Avoid abstractions. Use the forum as an opportunity to raise your education issues.
 - Prepare banners or signs featuring pro-education slogans to place around the room. They will provide an interesting background for camera crews and help generate excitement.
 - Determine the format of the forum. How much time will each candidate be allotted for introductory remarks? Will questions from the floor be directed to one candidate or answered by all candidates who want to reply? How much time will be allotted for responses? Try to keep candidates' responses brief and to the point.
 - Appoint a moderator.
 - Research several issues of interest to teachers, parents and the public. To keep the forum moving, arrange for teachers and parents to ask questions on those issues, but don't ask your prepared questions to the exclusion of the public's questions.
 - Don't prepare questions of interest only to teachers and parents. Such questions may generate hostility among the public members of the audience. Those questions are best handled through questionnaires.
 - Test the facility's audiovisual equipment and acoustics well before the forum gets under way. Don't wait until the forum begins to find out that the amplifiers are weak. Most audiences can absorb a lot of sound. It's better to have too much power than too little.
 - Set out fewer chairs than your audience will require. This will force audience members to sit close together, thereby generating excitement. If the facility looks half empty, media reporting may focus on poor attendance rather than on the substance of the forum. Make extra chairs readily available, if needed.
 - Extend invitations to the candidates on nomination day. Don't invite candidates who have been acclaimed. Obtain firm commitments to attend, if possible. Ensure that candidates know the rules of the forum.
 - Ask someone with communications experience to cover the forum for teachers and parents who can't attend.
 - Issue an advisory to the media about a week in advance. Follow up a day or two before the forum.
 - Send notice of the forum to other interest groups (such as chambers of commerce, school council associations and organizations for people with disabilities).
- Taking Action**
- Contact candidates the evening before the forum to remind them of the time and place.
 - Arrive at the facility early to double-check the seating, the sound system and the refreshments. Make sure that extra seats are readily available. Don't forget any details: Is there water for the candidates? Is a stopwatch available for the moderator?
 - Greet candidates as they arrive. Give them name tags.
 - Open the forum with brief introductory remarks. Introduce the candidates, set out the ground rules, and tell the audience how long the forum can be expected to last.
 - Ensure that candidates stick to the time limit for their introductory remarks. Give candidates a 30-second or 1-minute warning before their time elapses.
 - Don't allow speeches from the floor. If an audience member begins to ramble, politely ask them to state their question.
 - Vary the order in which candidates reply to the questions.
 - Conclude the forum by allowing each candidate to give a short closing statement. Reverse the order in which the candidates delivered their introductory remarks.

- Start on time, and end on time.
- Thank the candidates and the audience for participating in the forum. Thank the organizers later.
- Allow the audience to socialize with the candidates after the forum. Some audience members may have more questions, and journalists may want to conduct one-on-one interviews with candidates.
- Leave the facility in the condition in which you found it. Don't leave a mess for the caretaker to clean up.

Follow-Up Activities

- Write thank-you letters to the candidates who attended the forum.
- If the media did not attend, issue a news release highlighting significant questions and responses.
- Distribute a record of the forum to teachers and parents as soon as possible.

Potential Problems

- Candidates, particularly incumbents, may claim that they have previous engagements. Such claims should pass without comment, at the forum itself and in subsequent news releases.
- Certain candidates may stack the forum with their supporters. If those supporters try to monopolize the microphones, ask teachers and parents with prepared questions to move to the microphones as quickly and as quietly as possible. The forum must not turn into a witch hunt.
- Poor turnout is the biggest potential problem. Good publicity will generally ensure a good turnout. Consider directly contacting teachers and parents to encourage them to attend the forum.

Alternative Actions

- If your group is large or if the number of candidates is small, hold a candidate forum for group members only. This simplifies publicity, requires a smaller facility and encourages frankness. Hold the invitation-only forum as soon as possible after nomination day. Let candidates know that they can solicit campaign workers during the forum. The

prepared questions should reflect teachers' and parents' concerns so that they can get a clear understanding of which candidates to support. Exclude the media from this type of forum.

- An invitation-only forum requires a concerted effort to ensure high attendance. In your publicity, connect the forum with your group's concerns. Distribute the publicity to teachers and parents. In some areas, school council members alone will constitute a sizable audience.
- If you don't want to hold your own forum, ensure that teachers and parents raise questions at other forums. Distribute reports on those forums to teachers and parents. Consider contacting the organizers to see if teachers and parents can set up displays and make themselves available to the public to discuss education issues following the forum.

Key Points

- ▶ Hold your forum on an evening when no other major community events are scheduled.
- ▶ Pick a facility that will not look half-empty if turnout is low.
- ▶ Publicize the forum. Connect your issues to the public's immediate concerns.
- ▶ Be sure that the media covers the forum.
- ▶ Double-check the sound system, seating and other details at the facility before the candidates and the audience arrive.
- ▶ Lay out the ground rules for the forum. Stick to those rules.
- ▶ Pack the facility with teachers, parents and other supporters of public education.
- ▶ Ensure that questions are asked by giving teachers and parents prepared questions in advance.

Promoting the Issues

Voters often make choices based on name recognition, good looks, strong personalities, strong stands on single issues and a host of other questionable grounds. An issues campaign will help focus voters' attention on the education issues that candidates should have clear positions on.

Purpose

- To redirect voters' attention from names and personalities to issues
- To educate the public about the school system
- To mobilize the sympathetic vote
- To increase public awareness of and interest in the election

Resources

People

- An issues campaign requires a publicity coordinator, researchers and a graphic designer (or someone familiar with layout techniques). People with imagination and vision are an asset.

Time

- The amount of time required depends on the amount and nature of the publicity and the number of issues involved in the campaign.
- Preparation should begin well before September, if you desire long-term publicity.
- A short campaign limits publicity to the campaign period. Materials should be ready by early September.

Money

- Expenses will vary, according to the nature of the publicity.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select the core committee—a coordinator, researchers and a graphic designer.
- Decide how much money you are willing to spend. This will determine how many issues you promote and which vehicles you employ for publicity.
- Review the current board's activities. Identify issues of critical importance to teachers, parents and the public over the next four years. Prepare a short list of issues on which all candidates should take a public stand. (See Considerations for Choosing an Issue [p 61].)
- Prepare a list of local media outlets. Prepare a short list of publicity techniques that are feasible in terms of your location and the amount of money you wish to spend. Possibilities for publicity include letters to the editor, special newspaper features, talk show appearances, newspaper or radio ads, brochures, posters, buttons, bumper stickers, media releases, selected mailings, billboards, speeches to community groups, T-shirts, balloons and news conferences. (See Publicity Pointers [pp 71–75].)
- Research the issues on your short list. Gather basic facts and supplement them with teachers' and parents' personal experiences. Drop issues that are too abstract or that cannot be supported with facts or widespread experience.
- Choose the issues you want to promote. Limit yourself to five or fewer. Too many issues will only confuse the public.
- Obtain estimates for the publicity techniques on your short list.

- Choose your publicity techniques. Focus on one technique and supplement it with two others. Reinforce your message by repeating it in a variety of forms.
- Develop advertising angles by brainstorming. Ask committee members to suggest ideas, toss those ideas around, and determine which idea prompts the strongest and most positive response.
- Advertising slogans should be short, catchy and concrete. Use wit to make your point, but don't employ cleverness at the public's expense. Your slogans should show the public that teachers and parents are on their side.
- Relate your ads and issues to the public's immediate concerns. Provide a few facts, but don't overwhelm your audience with complex evidence. Convince the public by repeating your points, not by developing philosophical arguments.
- Prepare rough drafts of ads, posters and other publicity. Test them on a few teachers and parents.
- Prepare a final list of strategies and an implementation schedule. Establish realistic deadlines.
- Prepare final copy, artwork, speakers' notes and other materials by the end of June for a long-term issues campaign or by early September for a short-term campaign. Keep in mind the date of nomination day. Expect publication and distribution to take at least two weeks.

Taking Action

- For a long-term, maximum-impact campaign, begin publicizing your issues long before June. You can make speeches to service clubs at any time. Schedule appearances on talk shows for the end of the school year or early September, when interest in education is high. Letters to the editor can be written and mailed during the months preceding the election.
- Organize your campaign to build to a climax. Start with low-key techniques and build to those that employ gimmicks. Use gimmicks only to reinforce your points. Don't centre your campaign on them.

- Include articles about your issues campaign in your newsletter. Report on every aspect of the campaign as it occurs. Keep teachers and parents informed.
- Double-check that your materials will be ready on time. If you fall behind schedule, the public may become bored with your issues campaign instead of being swept up by it.

Follow-Up Activities

- Keep copies of your materials, including the original artwork. They may come in handy during by-elections.
- Talk to teachers and parents. Ask them to evaluate the effectiveness of your issues campaign. Did they notice it? Were they convinced? Did it influence their vote?
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your issues campaign. This will prove useful when the next election rolls around.
- Send copies of your materials to the ATA for use in future elections and by-elections.

Potential Problems

- An issues campaign can easily become gimmicky. Gimmicks carried to extremes serve little useful purpose. Bear in mind the needs of your community. Flashy approaches and slick appeals won't go over well in small towns. Keep your feet planted firmly on the ground.
- An issues campaign can also become pedantic or self-righteous. Ask yourself, Would I pay attention to this issue if someone else raised it? Would I read this ad? Would I be convinced?
- Overextending yourself is tempting in an issues campaign. Remember that the gap between conception and reality is time.

Key Points

- ▶ Begin planning your issues campaign well in advance.
 - ▶ Set your budget and stick to it.
 - ▶ Choose issues that are relevant to the public and that will help voters distinguish between candidates.
 - ▶ Don't try to tackle more than five issues.
 - ▶ Vary the forms in which you deliver your message, if possible.
 - ▶ Repeat your message several times.
 - ▶ Orchestrate your campaign so that it peaks on election day.
- Will the issue put you on the defensive? If so, forget it. You can't win a race in reverse gear.
 - Is the issue too complex to be explained easily?
 - Does the issue lie within the board's authority? You may think the funding framework needs work, but if it's within the jurisdiction of the provincial government, a trustee can't do much about it.

Considerations for Choosing an Issue

- Will the issue help voters distinguish between candidates? Will it swing votes? If not, it is not an important issue.
- Are some issues already on the public's mind? Talk to people about their concerns about the local school system. Review the last election by talking to people and reading newspaper accounts. If the key issues from the last election have not been resolved, consider reviving them in this election.
- Are you a credible speaker on the issues you have selected? Do you have the authority to make statements that will count? Will the public find your position palatable?
- Will bringing the issue before the public generate support for the candidates who agree with your views? For example, a strong position on teaching and learning conditions may generate more support for pro-management-rights candidates than for pro-union candidates. Or you may oppose banning or restricting library materials, but will bringing the issue of censorship into the election do you more harm than good? Just because you support a position does not mean everyone does.

Organizing a Letters-to-the-Editor Blitz

Letters to the editor are read widely, help shape public opinion and allow people to express opinions that are not normally reported in the media. Recruit a group of teachers and parents to write letters to the editor on key education issues.

Purposes

- To draw public attention to a variety of education issues
- To reinforce election themes through repetition
- To increase public awareness and appreciation of teachers' and parents' roles in education
- To introduce new issues into the campaign

Resources

People

- A coordinator and a few assistants are required to organize the letters-to-the-editor blitz.
- The number of teachers and parents recruited to write letters will vary according to the duration of the letter-writing campaign, the number of issues addressed and the number of local newspapers.

Time

- Two or three weeks will be needed for organizing the letter-writing campaign and researching the issues on which the letters will focus.
- The letters themselves can be written in one or two evenings. Ideally, they should be written before summer break begins.

Money

- Costs are minimal. You will need stationery, stamps and refreshments for the letter-writing evening. (Letter writers may choose to send their letters via e-mail, but legible handwritten letters are fine.)

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select a coordinator and a few assistants.
- Choose the issues on which the letters will focus. Prioritize those issues.
- Determine the length of the letter-writing campaign. You may want to start slowly, many months before the election gets under way, and increase the volume of letters as election day nears. Or you may want to send letters only during the four-week campaign period.
- List teachers and parents who may be interested in writing letters. Contact them to see if they are willing to set aside an hour or two for the task. Choose people who have knowledge of and experience with your high-priority issues.
- Research your key issues. Focus on a few basic facts for each issue. Letters to the editor should be brief and pointed.
- Prepare a tipsheet for the letter writers. (See *Tips for Writing Letters* [p 64].)
- Prepare a list of newspapers that cover the board's activities. Check publication deadlines.
- Set a date for the letter-writing evening.
- Secure a meeting place.

- Purchase stationery (in a variety of styles and sizes) and stamps.
- Prepare a mailing schedule according to the education issue, the newspaper and the desired date of publication. The letters should appear to be sent to newspapers randomly, not as part of a concerted effort.

Taking Action

- Explain the purpose of the campaign to the letter writers.
- Describe the key issues. Ask for volunteers to write letters on each of those issues. Ensure that your high-priority issues receive the most attention. Each writer can write several letters on the same issue, for various newspapers.
- Ensure that the writers are relaxed. They are not being asked to pen Pulitzer Prize-winning entries. The point of the letters is the issues themselves.
- Go over the tipsheet for writing letters.
- Assign a mailing date for each letter. Have writers date their letters accordingly.
- Collect the letters at the end of the evening. Arrange them according to newspaper and mailing date. Check for gaps or bunching. You don't want many letters to arrive simultaneously on an editor's desk. This could result in the publication of only one or two letters.
- Record the date and the writer of each letter. This will help you determine whether the letters have been published. Mail follow-up letters only after the initial letters have been published.
- Reinforce the importance of adhering to the mailing schedule.
- Thank everyone involved.

Follow-Up Activities

- Monitor the newspapers for the published letters. When a letter is published, contact the writer of the follow-up letter to let them know that they can go ahead and mail it.
- Send thank-you letters to teachers and parents who were involved in the letter-writing campaign.

Potential Problems

- Teachers and parents may see your efforts to coordinate a letter-writing campaign as being manipulative.
- Newspapers may catch on to your campaign and refuse to publish the letters. This is unlikely, however, if your letters make good, issue-related points.

Alternative Actions

- Include students in the letter-writing campaign.
- Forgo the letter-writing evening. Instead, contact your writers individually. Ask them to write on a specific issue and to mail the letter on a specific date. Follow up to ensure that they meet the deadline.

Key Points

- ▶ Schedule the mailing of the letters to avoid gaps and bunching.
- ▶ Ensure that the letters address your high-priority issues from more than one angle.
- ▶ Mail follow-up letters once the initial letters have been published.
- ▶ Keep the letters personal and spontaneous. Don't use form letters.

Tips for Writing Letters

- ◆ Get to the point. Most newspapers edit letters for length. If you ramble, your letter will be condensed. You don't want your key messages to be removed in the process.
- ◆ Focus on one issue. Support your views with clear, simple arguments.
- ◆ Keep your letter to one page (approximately 250 words).
- ◆ Avoid using a form letter. Your letter should convey your own opinions and writing style.
- ◆ Include examples from your own experience. Show how the issue affects you and your students or children.
- ◆ State briefly the connection between the issue and the election.
- ◆ Be plain and factual. Avoid inflammatory rhetoric. You'll only alienate the reader.
- ◆ Commend in addition to criticizing.
- ◆ Keep a copy of your letter. Editing may alter your intended meaning. If this happens, write another letter to clarify.
- ◆ Include your name and address on the letter. The editor may want to verify its authorship.

Arranging a Targeted Leaflet Drop

A targeted leaflet drop is an inexpensive form of publicity. It also stimulates discussion about the election and gives teachers and parents a chance to recommend candidates. Ask teachers and parents to distribute election leaflets to five friends or acquaintances. This personal contact makes it more likely that people will carefully read the leaflet, thereby helping to mobilize the sympathetic vote.

Purpose

- To increase the profile of the election
- To involve teachers and parents in the election by motivating them to decide early in the campaign how they will vote
- To convey education issues and teachers' and parents' viewpoints to potentially sympathetic voters
- To increase the turnout of sympathetic voters on election day

Resources

People

- A coordinator and a small committee will be needed to undertake research, prepare the leaflet and distribute the leaflet to participants.

Time

- The amount of time required will vary according to the leaflet's size. Check other action plans (such as *Using Questionnaires Effectively* and *Promoting the Evaluation of Candidates*) to estimate the time required to prepare the leaflet.

Money

- The major expense will be printing the required number of leaflets (five times the number of participants).
- Some teacher release time may be necessary.

Action Checklist

Preliminaries

- Select the coordinator and the committee. Include people with research and communications experience.
- Determine the number of participants (teachers and parents who will distribute the leaflets).
- Determine how many copies of the leaflet you will need. Aim for each participant to distribute five leaflets. (Some may be reluctant to distribute more than one leaflet.) Obtain printing estimates.
- Determine the content and the form of the leaflet. For example, your leaflet could include a description of issues of concern to teachers and parents, a candidate evaluation chart and candidates' questionnaire responses.
- Develop leaflets that complement ads you are running in newspapers or on radio stations.
- See *Publicity Pointers* (pp 71–75) for tips on preparing leaflets.
- Write a cover letter to explain to teachers and parents why you are asking them to distribute the leaflet to five friends. Point out that people will see the views in the leaflet as being more credible when they receive it from a friend. Indicate that distributing the leaflets won't take much of their time but may greatly benefit the local school system. Emphasize that distributing leaflets gives them a chance to influence five other voters.

- Arrange for the bundling and distribution of the leaflets and cover letters. Make sure participants have the leaflets in hand at least 10 days before election day.

Taking Action

- Stuff envelopes with leaflets and cover letters.
- Distribute the leaflets to participants.
- Keep the date of election day in mind. Give participants enough time to distribute the leaflets. Give those who receive the leaflets enough time to consider the contents.
- Establish a hotline for teachers and parents who desire more information or want more leaflets to distribute.

Follow-Up Activities

- Forward a copy of your leaflet to the ATA. Other groups may want to adapt it for future elections.

Potential Problems

- Many teachers and parents will discard their leaflets instead of distributing them. Make sure that you convey the importance of distributing the leaflets. Ask them to forward any leaflets they don't want to their school representative or school council chair. Others may want more leaflets to distribute. Reinforce the importance of the leaflet drop to school representatives and school council chairs. Their encouragement will be key to the drop's success.
- Your leaflet may be ineffective if it is too abstract. Make sure that the content is specific and meaningful.

Alternative Actions

- Maximize the impact of your leaflet drop through a mobilize-the-vote campaign on election day. Ask teachers and parents to contact the people to whom they distributed the leaflet to remind them that it is election day and to encourage them to vote. This action requires another letter to participants, as well as a poster or another internal advertising campaign to emphasize to teachers and parents their potential power and the importance of widespread participation. Last-minute contact on election day allows teachers and parents to recommend candidates, which may result in a significant increase in the number of sympathetic votes.
- Ask teachers and parents to forward to the committee the names of sympathetic voters. The committee then organizes a phone blitz on election day to mobilize that vote. Handle this very carefully to avoid upsetting individual teachers and parents and to avoid violating privacy or confidentiality. Keep in mind that a phone call from a third party is also likely to be less effective than a call from a friend.

Key Points

- ▶ Explain to teachers and parents the purpose of the leaflet drop. Make it clear that their personal contact with their friends is key to the campaign. Also make it clear that their role goes beyond being a courier.
- ▶ Coordinate the drop to coincide with ads you are running. Your election action plans should complement and reinforce one another.

Working with a Citizen Action Committee

During elections, many communities see the formation of citizen action committees, including committees of citizens concerned about education.

Unless people knowledgeable about public education are actively involved, these committees can end up focusing on niche or reactionary issues. Keep tabs on the committee's work by assigning people to monitor its meetings.

You may be able to work with the committee. Teacher representation on the committee will increase its profile and ensure that it develops sound education policies.

If you find that you must line up against the committee, ensure that you make the public aware of your issues as early as possible to neutralize the committee's plans. Be prepared.

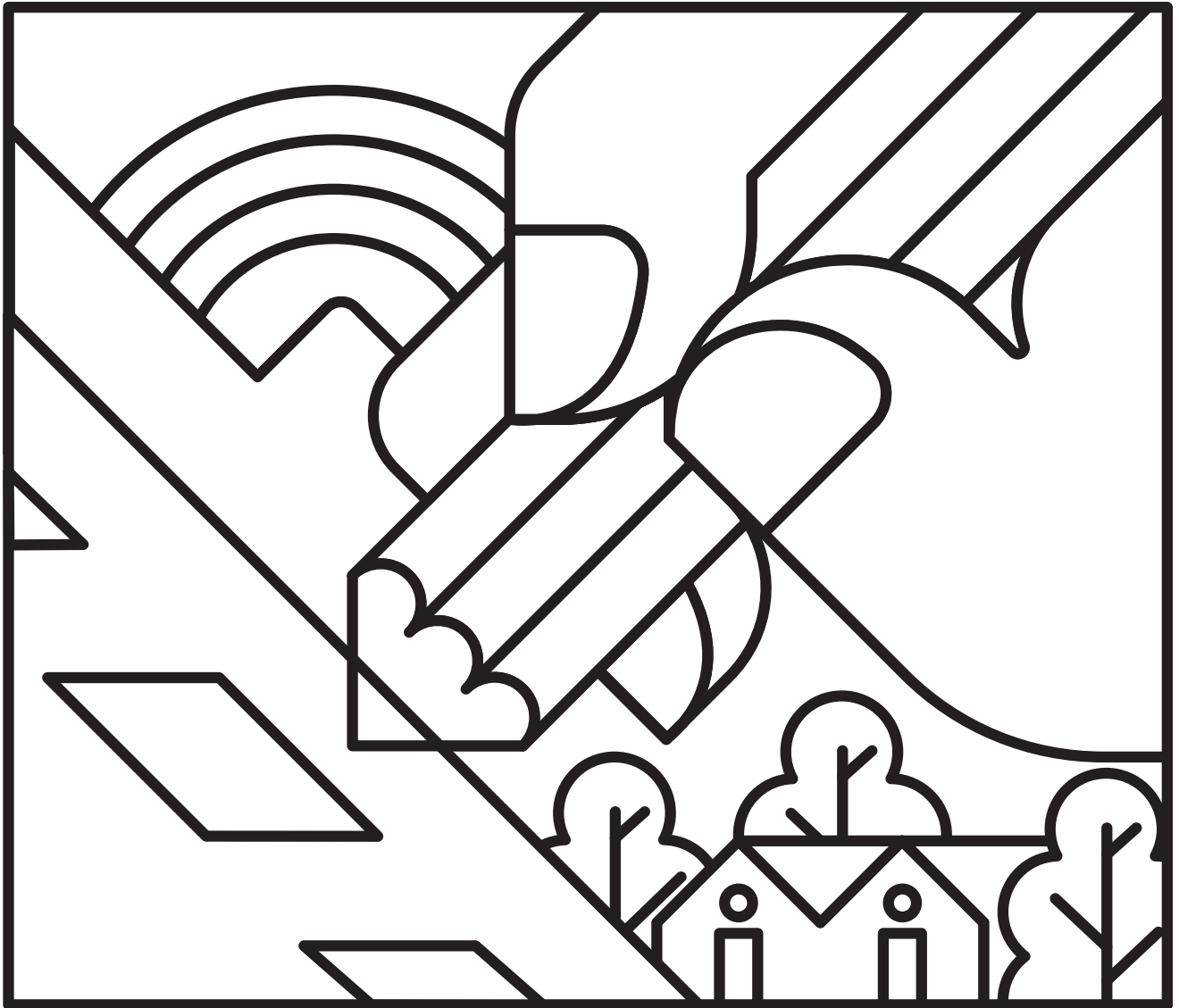
Encouraging Nonpartisan Electoral Assistance

Some teachers and parents may feel uneasy about certain forms of election activity but still want to participate somehow.

You can encourage nonpartisan electoral assistance by organizing activities meant to help make the electoral process go more smoothly. Examples include organizing babysitting services and offering seniors a ride to the polls.

Another form of nonpartisan election activity is undertaking a campaign that simply urges people to vote. In a world where school board elections generate little interest and voter participation is declining, this type of campaign is laudable. But it is not likely to significantly affect the outcome of the election. The reality of politics is that *how* people vote is more important than *how many* people vote.

These nonpartisan activities may gain some positive publicity for your group. Consider undertaking such activities in conjunction with more-productive election actions.



Publicity Pointers

Publicity gives you the chance to reach a wider audience.

Before you plan your publicity, ensure that you know exactly what you want to achieve.

When you prepare your publicity, convey your point as precisely as possible. Then stop. Leave your audience with a clear directive. If you have made your case, they will be waiting to be told what to do. Tell them.

Newspaper Ads

- Write copy that connects with the immediate, concrete concerns of the public. Don't focus on issues of interest only to teachers and parents, unless you can show that the public will also benefit.
- Ask hard questions. State facts boldly. Use humour to make your point (if appropriate).
- Keep your message short and punchy. Use an eye-catching slogan or statement. Present one or two facts and an editorial comment relevant to those facts. Conclude with another short, punchy statement.
- Run a common phrase or theme through all your ads to give them the strength of repetition.
- Find out whether the newspaper can reduce or enlarge your camera-ready copy. Make your ad larger than the printed ad will be. The reduced version will be neater and will have sharper lines.
- Use a typeface that will make your main message stand out. Don't use an ornate typeface or many different typefaces. You'll only clutter up your space and make your message hard to read.
- Use graphics to attract attention to your ad, but don't become gimmicky. A few well-placed graphics are all you need. Use photographs only if they are sharp and convey your point.
- Look at your ad. Would your attention be drawn to it in the corner of a crowded newspaper?
- Remember the importance of white space. Don't overload the space. Make your message easy to read.
- Sequence your ads so that they appear in several consecutive issues or on more than one page of a single issue of the newspaper.
- Identify your group as the ad's sponsor. This will generate good publicity.

- Proofread the ad before you submit it to the newspaper. Then proofread it again.
- Ask the editor where in the newspaper your ad will appear. Push for a prominent spot.
- Avoid full-page ads. They tend to leave the impression that your group has a lot of money.

Brochures, Flyers and Leaflets

- Distribute brochures, flyers or leaflets to teachers, parents or other interest groups. Hand them out at forums.
- Be aware that although the costs of producing a brochure, flyer or leaflet are quite low, distributing them through the mail can be expensive.
- Before you prepare or print the material, decide what you want to achieve with it and who should see it. To cut costs and increase efficiency, reduce the size of your target group to those who will be most affected by your message.
- Limit yourself to one or two issues per brochure, flyer or leaflet.
- Keep your message short and punchy. Avoid jargon, ambiguities and generalities.
- Relate the issue to your readers. Deal with facts relevant to their lives. Use examples based on their everyday experiences to illustrate your point.
- Relate the issue to the election. Show how the election will affect your readers now and over the next four years.
- Use simple graphics. Don't make your brochure, flyer or leaflet look cheap or flashy.
- Use photographs that convey your message. Crop to the area of impact. Never use a fuzzy or low-contrast photograph.
- Ensure that your copy is easy to read. Make it large and clean. Leave a lot of white space.
- Test a mock-up on a few people. Trust their response. If they don't like it, start over.
- Double-check printing schedules. Ensure that your brochure, flyer or leaflet will be ready when you need it.
- Work out your distribution plans well in advance.

- Identify the sponsor and printer of the brochure, flyer or leaflet. This will generate good publicity.
- Proofread your copy before you send it to the printer. Then proofread it again. Then ask someone else to proofread it. The first thing people notice is a spelling or grammatical error.

Posters

- Follow the same general guidelines for posters as for newspaper ads and brochures, flyers and leaflets.
- Keep your message simple and relevant to the concerns of your audience.
- Create a strong visual appeal. Use bold graphics or an eye-catching photograph. If you only use text, you won't catch people's attention long enough for them to absorb your message. If text is your only resource, use a bold slogan or single word to attract attention.
- Use heavy poster stock. You don't want your poster to blow away on a windy day.
- Organize an evening blitz to post the posters in the community. The posters will attract more attention if they appear suddenly and all at once than if they appear sporadically.
- Record the location of your posters. Check back after a few days in case they have been covered by other materials or need fresh staples. Remove the posters after the election is over.

Buttons

- Keep messages on buttons brief. A symbol alone may suffice. You can pitch your issue when people ask you what the symbol means.
- Use colour sparingly.
- Develop two or three different buttons. Introduce them sequentially. Introduce each button suddenly. A button will provoke a reaction for a few days and then will become of little or no interest. Time the introduction of each button into the campaign.
- Charge for your button only if the button is irresistible and you desperately need the money.

T-Shirts

- Keep messages on T-shirts brief. Use humour. Use a slogan that will still be relevant after the election. People don't like to buy clothes that they can wear publicly for only one month.
- Use a line drawing, a sketch or another form of graphic illustration. If you make your T-shirt a work of art, people will want to wear it and others will notice it. Avoid photographs. Observe copyright laws.
- Allow two weeks to one month for printing the T-shirts.
- Don't overestimate the demand for your T-shirts. They are expensive. It's better to order a second printing than to end up with a closet full of identical T-shirts.

Radio Ads

- Be aware that radio ads reach a large audience but are more expensive than newspaper ads.
- Keep your ad short and to the point. Like newspaper ads, radio ads should connect with the public's interests and concerns. Make your message relevant.
- Deal with only one issue per ad. Convey only one or two points about that issue. You have time only to state your case, not to argue.
- Keep your language plain and simple. Avoid complex syntax, long sentences, unusual tenses and weighty ideas. Writing a good radio ad is difficult. Leave time for fine tuning.
- Tie your radio spots together with a common theme or slogan.
- Avoid fancy effects. Let the radio announcer read your ad. Announcers understand modulation.
- Read your copy aloud several times. Be alert for tongue twisters and other stumbling blocks. Is the message clear and concise? Check with others if you have doubts.
- Time your copy before you forward it to the radio station. Read it aloud. Don't rush yourself. You may be speaking faster or slower than you think.
- Don't buy spots longer than 30 seconds.

- Buy a time slot that will reach your intended audience. You are trying to reach parents and grandparents, not students. Book your time slot well in advance.
- Schedule your ads for effect. Increase the number of spots as election day nears.

News Releases and Feature Releases

- Issue news releases before you place ads. The public is resistant to advertising. Your news release may result in a news story or an editorial. These will convey your message more effectively than an ad.
- Use feature releases to draw attention to your issue several weeks or even months before election day. A feature release is written for immediate publication and does not require extensive editing. It focuses on a problem or program and provides facts and personal experiences. Feature releases are more likely to be picked up in rural areas than in urban areas. Daily newspapers rarely pick up feature releases, but weekly newspapers publish them—untouched—surprisingly often.
- Prepare two or three feature releases. Distribute them sequentially to local newspapers. Research your releases carefully. Misinformation will generate bad publicity and damage relations between you and local news editors.
- Issue news releases sparingly. Ensure that they contain news, not rehashed arguments. For example, your local president could challenge candidates to publicly state their positions on an issue. Or your local could announce that it is campaigning for specific improvements to the school system.
- Check local news deadlines. Get your news release into the hands of the editor or the education reporter well before the deadline. This will increase the odds that your story will receive a prominent place in the newspaper.
- Write your news release in journalistic style. See the tips on the right.
- Try to get the release into everyone's hands at the same time. Don't forget any media outlets. Don't play favourites.
- Don't call the editor or the education reporter to ask why your release wasn't covered. If it wasn't covered, it wasn't seen as newsworthy.

Tips for Writing a Release in Journalistic Style

- Cover the five Ws—who, what, when, where and why—in the first paragraph but not necessarily in the first sentence.
- Use short words, sentences and paragraphs.
- Limit your release to one page. Don't try to tell all. Focus on the points of principal interest.
- Grab the reader's attention early. Then develop the details. Editors generally cut from the bottom up, so place the most important information first.
- Use concrete words.
- Avoid education jargon.
- Double-check spelling (especially names) and grammar.
- Double-check facts.
- Provide the following information at the beginning of the release:
 - The name and address of your local
 - An indication that the document is a release
 - The release date (the date the release is issued)
- Follow with a simple and informative title. Avoid cleverness. Your title will probably not appear in the newspaper anyway.
- Double-space the release. Use only one side of the page. Leave wide margins. Don't carry sentences over from one page to the next.
- End each page at the end of a paragraph, if possible. Indicate that the copy continues on the next page by centring *-more-* at the bottom of the page.
- Centre *-30-* at the end of the release.
- Follow with the name of a contact person and their contact information.

News Conferences

- Call a news conference only when your news is truly newsworthy. Don't call one if you don't have anything significant to say. If you waste their time, the media won't bother to show up next time.
- Schedule the news conference during regular working hours. Like most people, journalists generally work nine-to-five days.
- Announce the news conference a day or two in advance. Indicate the topic, the time and place, and the speaker(s). Don't go into detail. Don't give the story away before the news conference.
- Prepare a news release that summarizes the main points covered during the news conference. Distribute the release once the news conference begins.
- Pick a room large enough for journalists and camera crews. Ensure that the room is well-lit. Don't use an auditorium or any other huge, open area.
- Provide refreshments.
- Provide an interesting background for the speaker. Place a few props around the room for camera crews to shoot (for example, posters, banners or copies of relevant reports).
- Start on time. Keeping the media waiting generates frustration and possibly even hostility.
- Introduce the speaker. Indicate that journalists may ask questions after the speaker has delivered the statement.
- Conclude the news conference after the questions. Some journalists may request one-on-one interviews with the speaker once the conference has wrapped up.
- Decide whether to develop a single-purpose microsite or to house the content in a section of your local's website. If you want to use your local's website, work closely with your web manager. Otherwise, find a teacher volunteer or contract a web designer to build a new site.
- Look at the options for hosting and content management. If you don't have web publishing experience, connect with someone who does.
- Obtain a simple, clear domain name that you can easily display on other campaign materials.
- Create a simple and clean front page that draws the attention of your audience, does not inundate them with too much information and easily connects them to the information they are looking for.
- Maintain pages that profile the candidates or that house the materials you've developed for other media.
- Keep the navigation menu simple and easy to use.
- Use a blog to share news stories related to the campaign or a day-to-day exploration of the issues. Allow candidates or other interested parties to post comments.
- Consider an online blog tool, like Blogger or WordPress, which are free and easy to use.
- Take advantage of the opportunities for two-way interaction that web media provide. Turn on commenting so people can respond to your materials. Or host an ongoing Q&A, where people can submit questions for the candidates.
- Use social media (Facebook, Instagram, X) to gather an audience for your activities, to share your materials and to draw people to your website.
- Be aware that managing social media takes time. Establish a social media presence early. Use other communications vehicles to draw attention to your social media. Push out new information regularly.
- Monitor your social media. Respond to comments and inquiries. Deal with inappropriate comments or content quickly.
- Remove or archive online materials at the end of the election period. Maintain the architecture for the next election, but remove stagnant material from the active Internet.

Websites, Blogs and Social Media

- Use websites, blogs and social media to support your action plans and to easily share information about the candidates, the issues and the election.

Speeches

- Use speeches to present your case and neutralize the opposition. Speeches are seldom used to muster support.
- Approach service clubs, chambers of commerce and other interest groups. Indicate that, since it is an election year, your local would like to generate interest in education issues. Ask for a few minutes at a meeting to talk about those issues. You are more likely to receive a speaking invitation if you know someone who can plant the idea beforehand. If there is no interest or a polite rebuff, drop the matter.

Preparing Your Speech

- Assemble your research on high-priority election issues. Prepare a short set of notes.
- Refer to the interests of the organization you are addressing. Show how your position is compatible with their objectives.
- Share personal examples and anecdotes. Avoid generalities and platitudes.
- Discuss concrete problems related to the issue before you discuss solutions. Show how the election connects with those solutions.
- State your case clearly, simply and strongly. Provide the opposite perspective. Point out why that perspective is incorrect or why it is fundamentally at odds with the views of the organization.
- Use repetitive phrases and keywords. Let your audience know where you are in your speech. Build to a climactic conclusion.
- Avoid education jargon.
- Be brief. Find out how much time you will be allotted. Aim for a few minutes less than that.

Developing Good Speaking Habits

- Type your speech or use notes. (Notes are better.) After practising your speech a few times, add comments on speaking style. Underline keywords

and phrases. Note where you should pause for effect. (Use that pause to take a sip of water.)

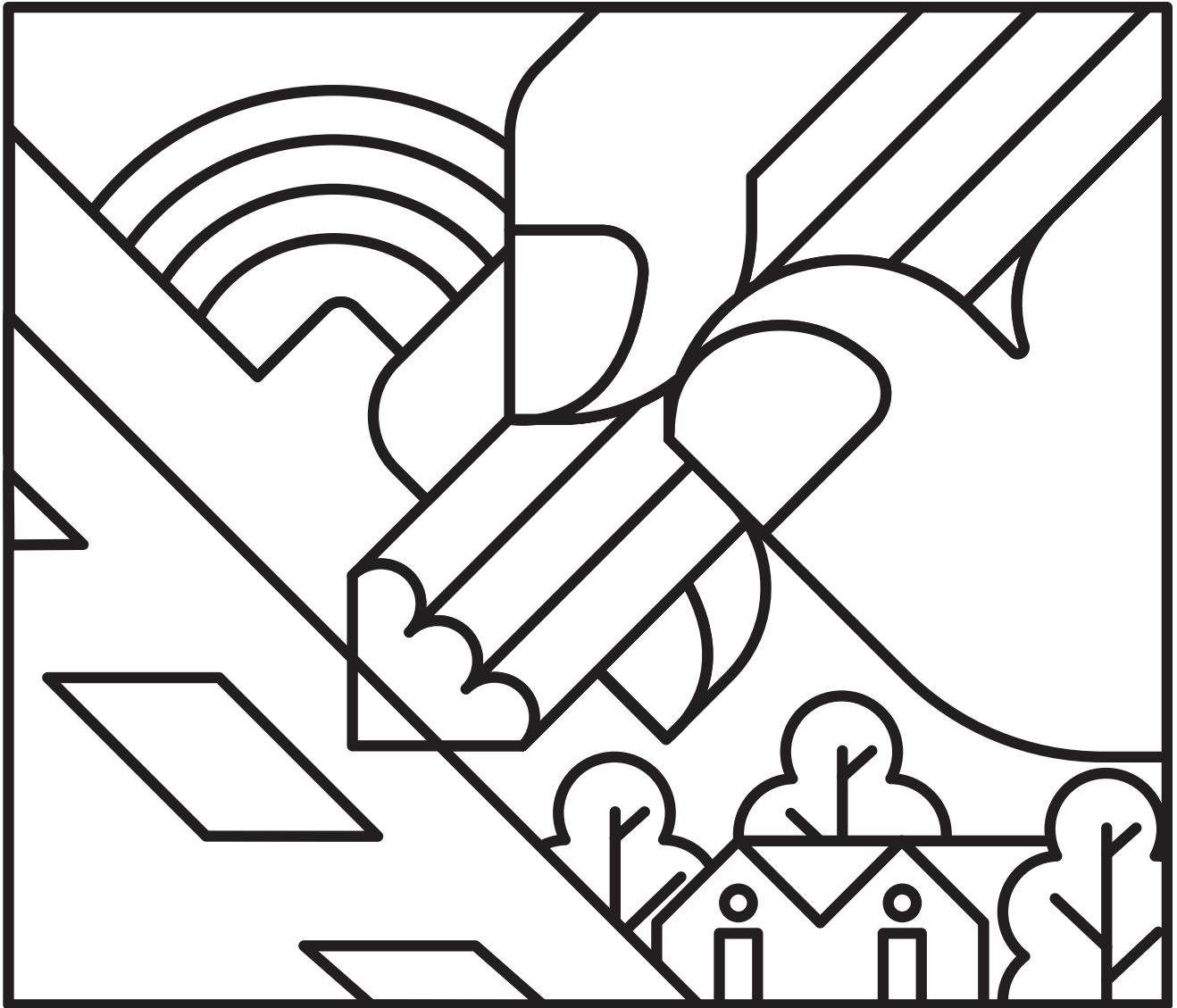
- Make sure that your pages or note cards are clearly numbered and in order before you begin speaking.
- Be careful not to speak too quickly. Pause. Ensure that you are breathing easily.
- Speak loudly. Before you begin, be sure that the people at the back of the room can hear you.
- Don't read your speech verbatim. Practise reading the speech until you are familiar with it. Then, use what you've written down as a guide. (For this reason, notes are preferable to scripts.)
- Look around the room as you speak. Make eye contact when you want to emphasize a point.
- End on time, and end emphatically. The audience should know when you have concluded. Their applause should not be hesitant.

Handling Questions

- When preparing your speech, pretend you are a member of the audience. Ask yourself questions and practise answering. Or get a friend to ask you questions.
- Don't become flustered if you don't know an answer. Promise to find the answer. Follow through.
- Don't become defensive if you are asked obnoxious questions. Answer those questions as tactfully as you would answer questions favourable to your cause.
- Avoid the awkwardness of having no questions to answer. If you know members of the organization, ask one or two of them beforehand to prepare questions to ask you.

Following Up

- Follow up with a thank-you letter to the organization's president.



Handling Opposition

Strategies for Handling Opposition

If your involvement in the election brings controversial issues to the fore or has the potential to influence a significant number of voters, expect to face attacks—from politicians, from the media or from other interest groups.

There is no surefire way to neutralize such opposition, but you can reduce its influence and minimize its impact on your election activities.

- Be prepared for criticism. When preparing your overall strategy, consider who may be threatened by your activities and how they are likely to react. If you think no one is likely to react, your planned campaign may be too innocuous.
- Try to neutralize opposition before it gels. If opposition emerges, try to bring that opposition on side by emphasizing your areas of agreement. The opposition may be based on misunderstanding rather than on a real difference of opinion.
- Remain as friendly, approachable and candid as possible. Your involvement in the election is democratic. Don't become defensive.
- Avoid emotional appeals and inflammatory rhetoric. You will only alienate the public and increase your opponent's popularity.
- Show voters why your views and actions are in their best interest.
- Don't respond to any charges levelled against you, if possible. Reacting to charges only gives them more credibility. Consider the implications of this headline: "Advocacy group denies interfering in school board elections." If the charges continue, ask a community leader to speak out in favour of what you are doing.
- Keep members of your group informed about what you are doing. They shouldn't have to find out from others.
- React to charges indirectly by introducing a new element into your campaign. Demonstrate your belief in what you are doing by continuing or expanding your initiatives.
- Remain calm. If you blow up, the opposition wins.

