



TSTA Guide for Candidate Screening & Endorsements

The Candidate Screening and Recommendation process is vital to your local's success in both issue organizing and negotiations with the members on your school board and legislators. This continues to be a critical time for TSTA members as the Texas Legislature conducted an almost yearlong session in 2021 with attacks on teaching honesty in education, transgender students, and suppressing our right to vote in elections. It also continued policies of unfair testing requirements, allowing districts to turn over campuses to unproven charter operators, and accountability standards that grade our schools with As and Fs. All during a pandemic which created a work environment which was unsafe for our students, employees and communities at large.

It is critical that every TSTA local has a working relationship with its school board and local legislators, and one of our tasks is electing candidates who care about public education and our members.

Candidate Screening and Endorsement

- ▶ For local races, the local should determine which seats on the school board are up for election and who has filed to run for those seats, send a questionnaire to candidates and review the candidate's response before the screening.
- ▶ The local should appoint a screening and recommendation committee that will conduct the interviews of the candidates.
- ▶ Before serving on a screening and endorsement committee, members should receive training in the process. A review of this guide should adequately train committee members.



➤ Once the committee makes an endorsement, the local should notify its membership and the endorsed candidate.

➤ The members of the screening and endorsement committee should take the lead in the campaign efforts to elect the recommended candidate. However, it is illegal to use dues money for direct campaign contributions. Every local should consult the Center for Public Affairs when using dues money for campaign

efforts. The only method by which a local can make a direct campaign contribution is by TSTA-PAC or incorporating a political action committee and maintaining proper documentation with the Texas Ethics Commission and the local school board. This includes any in-kind contribution such as printing, office use if the local has an office, office equipment, and materials.

➤ TSTA-PAC can contribute to local school board races. Please call the Center for Public Affairs with any questions you have about PAC support.

➤ The best and safest use of a local's resources is its members. Members can volunteer for the campaign at the campaign headquarters, and use campaign-produced materials and campaign equipment such as phones, copiers, etc.

A local should not endorse a candidate solely because the candidate is an educator. The same criteria that apply to all candidates also apply to a candidate who is an educator. When interviewing educator candidates, the team should keep in mind the following:

- An incumbent who has earned the local's support in past elections should continue to receive it, even if an educator files against the incumbent.
- If no significant differences appear in a group of candidates that includes an educator, an endorsement should not be made strictly because the candidate is an educator.



Sample School Board Candidate Questionnaire

You should use this as a model only. Include specific questions about local issues.

Please note that your responses, (excluding personal information in question #1), may be published or made public on local website or www.tsta.org.

- Please provide your name, address, phone numbers (home, cell, work), and e-mail address.
- Please provide brief biographical information about yourself, your family, your educational background, employment, organizations you belong to (professional, community, social), etc.
- Why are you running for school board? What are your goals for XISD?
- What do you see are the biggest problems confronting the district? Prioritize and explain. (You may want to identify specific issues currently faced in your district).
- Would you be willing to meet on a regular basis with the leadership/members of XEA/TSTA/NEA to discuss issues and concerns? How would we best accomplish this?
- Are you willing to commit the district's resources to make XISD the top employment choice for school employees? (This question could be revised to address salary, benefits and working conditions.) How would you propose to attract and retain those employees?
- Would you support efforts by the superintendent to turn campuses over to charter operators under SB 1882, instead of relying on the teachers and staff on the campus to do the work that needs to be done to educate the students at that campus, whether the campus is performing well or needs improvement?
- Do you support furloughs to save the district money? Do you support cutting teacher/employee salaries to save the district money?



- Are you willing to commit to having true site-based decision making at the campus level for XISD school employees and parents?
- What are your opinions about sex education and prayer in public schools? Why?
- Do you support vouchers for students who attend low-performing public schools? Explain.
- What is your position on teacher incentive pay based on student performance?
- Do you support using teacher evaluations in making decisions regarding reduction of force?
- Do you support using student test scores in evaluating a teacher's performance?
- Who and what groups do you consider your biggest supporters and why?
- If XEA/TSTA/NEA decided to endorse you, what would you like for us to do to help in your election campaign? (Money, person-to-person contact, other.) Please explain.
- Would you support an increase of the health insurance contribution rate for employees above the state minimum required by law?





Composition of the Screening and Endorsement Committee

Any member of your local can serve on a screening and endorsement committee for school board races. Legislative screening is limited to local Presidents and PAC Board members from locals within the legislative district. Members who have participated in TSTA's legislative candidate screening and recommendation committee process have prior experience and would make particularly good committee members. In addition, members who serve on the TSTA Legislative or PAC committees or who have gone through TSTA training would also be good committee members. Make sure the committee is diverse in representation.

Here are some key things to remember:

- Don't be adversarial with the candidate or start to argue.
- Be sure to let the candidate talk, not just the members of the interview committee.
- Steer away from anecdotal conversation or sharing your personal experiences.

Evaluating the Race

Prior to interviewing candidates who have filed in a particular race, the screening and endorsement committee should evaluate the race using the following criteria:

Open Seat (no incumbent)

- Assess the seriousness of the candidates and their ability to win.
- When interviewing candidates for open seats, the committee's goal should be to determine if any of the candidates support TSTA's issues and have the potential to win.



Inconsistent or Adversarial Incumbent

This race is one in which the incumbent has an inconsistent record of support or has proven to be an adversary to the local by consistently voting against the best interest of local members.

- ▶ The local should send an inconsistent or adversarial incumbent a candidate questionnaire and attempt to interview the incumbent along with those who have filed opposing the incumbent.
- ▶ The local should never endorse a historically inconsistent or adversarial incumbent unless the incumbent agrees to a firm commitment on the critical issues.
- ▶ Before endorsing a challenger, the committee should decide whether the candidate has a reasonably good chance of winning.

District Demographics and Electability

An additional factor to consider when looking at open seats and challengers running against inconsistent or adversarial incumbents is the demographics of the district.

- ▶ Even though school board elections are non-partisan, party sympathies can influence candidate support and the district's voting tendencies. If the district is overwhelmingly Republican or Democratic, does the candidate's profile match?
- ▶ Is there a dominant ethnic or racial voting bloc? How does has that bloc vote?
- ▶ What is the typical turnout, and can the candidate generate sufficient resources, volunteers, and interest to turn out a winning margin?





The Interview

1. If the candidate has returned the candidate questionnaire prior to the interview, the committee should look it over before the candidate arrives.
2. Introduce all members of the interview committee. Nametags will be helpful to the candidates.
3. Allow all candidates the same amount of interview time.
4. Allow each candidate a brief introductory statement.
5. Interview all candidates in an open seat and all running against an inconsistent or adversarial incumbent.
6. Interview only one candidate at a time.
7. Hold the interview session in a private meeting place where there are no interruptions.
8. Allow the candidate to do most of the talking.
9. Do not debate or challenge the candidate's past record and previous statements. When referring to past actions, do so to seek present positions, not to be argumentative.
10. Limit your discussions to educational issues. It is preferable to obtain answers to a set of recommended questions so that the candidate can communicate a broad education philosophy as well as positions on specific local goals.
11. Don't tip off the best answer to the candidate.
12. Inform the candidates of when the committee will make its decision.

AND REMEMBER, VOTE EDUCATION FIRST!