



Vote

www.parentsunited.org

Great public schools begin at the ballot box

If public education is going to be an important issue on state agendas, there must be a strong base of people willing to learn about candidates, share information, and, most importantly, **VOTE on Election Day**.

Elections for state and federal offices take place every even numbered year. The election season is a critical time for elected officials and candidates to travel throughout their districts to listen to the concerns and priorities of their constituents.

This is also one of the few occasions when citizens are able to solicit solid commitments from candidates and incumbents if they are elected into office.

There are four important dates in an election year:

- **Precinct Caucuses—February 2, 2010**
In election years, Minnesotans across the state gather at the neighborhood level to build an agenda of the issues and to support candidates to run for elected office. These meetings, called precinct caucuses, offer an excellent chance to educate neighbors about important issues and build support for policies in the form of platform resolutions.
- **Primary Elections—**
Previously September, soon to be August
Primary elections narrow the field of candidates to one per political party for the November general election. In 2010, the date for Minnesota primary elections is being adjusted from September to August. Watch for details!
- **Voter Pre-Registration Deadline—October**
The pre-registration deadline is 20 days before Election Day. You need to register to vote if you've never voted before, if you've moved since the last election or if you haven't voted in 4 years. NOTE: Minnesota allows citizens to register at the polls on election day. The Minnesota Secretary of State provides [Voter Registration](#) information in multiple languages.
- **General Elections—November 2, 2010**
The general election is when voters choose who will represent them at the federal, state and local levels. It's held every two years on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

Where do people go to vote?

Most people vote in the neighborhood where they live. To find out where to vote, check the [Online Polling Place Finder](#) or call (651) 296-2803 or (800) 600-VOTE. Polling hours usually run from 7:00 a.m.—8:00 p.m., although if you live outside the Twin Cities, the polls may not open until 10:00 a.m.

Minnesota law allows you to take time off from work without loss of salary or wages to vote during the morning of state elections. You may need to write a short letter to your employer requesting time off 20 days before Election Day. If you will be out of town on Election Day, you can vote by absentee ballot by mail or in-person. Check with your county auditor or municipal clerk to find out the procedure in your area.

Know the candidates—find out who's running for office in your area

The League of Women Voters' [Voter Guide](#) provides a detailed list of candidates and ballot measures at the local level. Parents United maintains a directory of [Major Political Parties in Minnesota and their platforms](#). Support for public education is a bipartisan issue, so you can't assume that party platforms alone will provide accurate information on a candidate's position. You'll have to do a bit of research. Once you know who's up for election, there are a number of ways to find out your candidates' stands on public education.

Know the issues—ask candidates how they will support public schools once elected!

The campaign season is an exciting time for advocates. It's the most vulnerable time in an elected official's term, so incumbents and candidates will be doing everything they can to secure votes from their constituents. Take advantage of the opportunity and [ask candidates](#) how they plan to support public schools if they are elected. If you like what you see, volunteer to work on a campaign!

Request a meeting

The best and most direct way to find out a candidate's position is to ask for a meeting. If you ask candidates to meet with your school parent group, don't forget to set aside some time to tour the school and show the candidates the challenges and successes of your school community. Use the meeting time to raise specific concerns and ask the candidates what their positions are on public education issues. You will not only be sharing important knowledge, you'll also be BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP with a potential elected official. Use the information provided through Parents United's [Legislators in the Schools](#) program to help you organize a visit, just know that during an election year equal time and access must be offered to all candidates for that office. A more efficient and effective use of your time might be to host a Candidate Forum.

Host or attend a candidate forum—
to learn how much your candidates know about public education issues and gauge their level of support for our public schools. A candidate forum is a public gathering of persons running for office in a given district or area to discuss issues of interest with the public. Two of the most frequent sponsors of candidate forums are [The League of Women Voters](#) and local Chambers of Commerce.

Parents United's [Parent Guide to Planning and Executing a Legislative Candidate Forum](#) is designed to help you forge a partnership between your parent network and the business community.

Encourage others to vote—be a catalyst for building a thriving democracy!

History has marked several occasions when a single vote determined a victor in an election, so every vote is meaningful. Dozens of people voting together can have an undeniable impact on Election Day, so try to make this a group or program effort.

- Offer rides to neighbors who lack transportation and encourage others to do the same.
- Let people know they can take their children to the polls. Some polling locations may even have activities available for young children.
- Coordinate a local [Kids Voting](#) effort—What better way to promote democracy than to teach our kids to vote?
- Distribute voter registration information including polling locations through your program.

Parents United is a member of the [Minnesota Participation Project](#), an exciting effort to support and expand the capacity of Minnesota nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations—*like parent groups!*—to effectively engage in permissible non-partisan voter engagement efforts.

Online Resources

Resources from the Parents United

Election Resources

Precinct Caucuses

Attend a Precinct Caucus

Create your own caucus resolutions!

Host or Attend a Candidate Forum

Sample Candidate Questions

Information on the rules guiding the election and advocacy activities of 501(c)3 organizations

www.parentsunited.org/ElectionResources.html

www.parentsunited.org/Caucus.html

www.parentsunited.org/sites/af9a45da-3380-4140-ad90-e2f6e67572e6/uploads/PrecinctCaucus-Attend.pdf

www.parentsunited.org/sites/af9a45da-3380-4140-ad90-e2f6e67572e6/uploads/Standard_Resolution_Form.doc

www.parentsunited.org/ElectionResources.html#CandidateForum

www.parentsunited.org/ElectionResources.html#Knowtheissues

www.parentsunited.org/Rules.html

Resources from the Minnesota Secretary of State (some information offered in multiple languages)

Online Caucus Finder (available after January 20th)

Polling Place Finder (where you vote, map & directions)

Voter Registration information in multiple languages

caucusfinder.sos.state.mn.us

pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us

www.sos.state.mn.us/index.aspx?page=204

Resources from the League of Women Voters

Voter Guide

Calendar of Candidate Forums

www.lwvmn.org/edfund/election.asp

www.lwvmn.org/EdFund/ForumsByCD.asp

Additional Resources

Minnesota Participation Project

Kids Voting

www.mnparticipationproject.org

www.kidsvoting.com

Check out other resources

State and local newspapers often provide information through up-to-date coverage on candidates and campaigns. Many radio stations, particularly [Minnesota Public Radio](#), carry programs on elections and seek interviews with candidates on both sides of the political spectrum.

Volunteer

If you connect closely with a candidate, consider volunteering for his or her campaign. Campaigns are a lot of work, so regardless of the task or time commitment, helping hands are appreciated. This is also one of the best ways to learn about the workings of democracy and to establish a relationship with your elected official.

Run yourself!

Remember that the people running for office are simply citizens trying to make a difference. If you're interested in making the same kind of impact as an elected official, run for office! Contact your affiliated political party for more information.

The bottom line is:

**Great public schools
begin at the ballot box**