

# The ABC Pre-Election Planner



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## The ABC Pre-Election Planner

School elections can be divided into thirds: 1. conceptualizing a ballot proposal; 2. designing and implementing a campaign plan; and, 3. doing what you promised during the campaign.

The first two-thirds are the most important because without them you won't get a chance to address the final third. And, without the final third, people will remember a failed election instead of a fulfilled promise.

The purpose of *The ABC Pre-Election Planner* is to help you be successful during the first third of your next election. It contains a checklist of items to think about before you finalize your ballot proposal and begin to design and implement your election campaign. *The ABC Pre-Election Planner* ends by giving you a clear understanding of what you need to do to develop a winning proposal.

**Read each statement below. Then grade your school district A, B, C, D, or F .**

1. Is what you are proposing justified? It's easy for a school leader to answer this question affirmatively, but does (or will) the proposal make sense to and receive the support of the proverbial "man on the street?" A B C D F
2. Is your proposal salable? You may want a new \$75 million high school, but if your community will support only \$50 million, your \$75 million proposal is not salable. A B C D F
3. Is there a climate of support? This has more to do with opinions about your school district than concerns about the state or national economy. (Actually, schools have done quite well at the polls during last decade's well publicized economic downturn.) If you have been honest with people and have built an inventory of goodwill, you are "one up." A B C D F
4. Have parents and other citizens been involved in development of the ballot proposal? Your chances of success are higher if people have had a chance to provide input. A B C D F
5. Does the board of education unanimously support the ballot proposal? Unanimous board support sends a strong signal to the community. Voting 6:1 to place the proposal on the ballot sends a different signal, one that becomes more distorted with every

negative vote.

A B C D F

6. Are school district employees generally supportive of the ballot proposal? As is the case with board of education support, employee support sends a strong signal. If your contracts aren't settled and there is labor unrest, securing community and staff support for the proposal will be a challenge.

A B C D F

7. Does your school district have a strategic plan? More importantly, do people in your community understand your district's priorities and its progress toward goals? You will run a more convincing campaign if you can tie your ballot proposal to a sensible strategic plan.

A B C D F

8. Do you have a recent, representative sampling of public opinion in your school district? You should know what people like and dislike about your schools, what they consider a source of pride, attitudes toward educational programs and services, communication needs, and so forth. It is one thing to think you know what people are thinking. It is something else to *really* know. Conducting a survey may be the most important pre-election task.

A B C D F

9. Do you have enough yes voters? People vote for a school financial proposal because they personally have something to gain if it succeeds. Whether it is a parent protecting his child's education or a citizen protecting her property values or someone else who will gain something else, are there enough of them to provide a base of support?

A B C D F

10. Will voters see your proposal as something that is needed now? Like most people, voters like to put things off. Unless there is a sense of urgency--preventing imminent damage to the instructional program, repairing a crumbling wall, enhancing safety and security--voters are likely to mentally put your proposal aside.

A B C D F

11. Does your school district have a written communication plan? If your communication program is research-based, accommodates both internal and external audiences, and provides people with the information that they need and want, your chances of winning on election day are much better than if you do not.

A B C D F

12. Do you disseminate good news? The Academy Awards ceremony is an extravaganza during which actors tell you how good they are and recognize their own achievements. Schools should do the same. They should let people know about their success and "blow their own horn" with pride.

A B C D F

13. Do you have enough lead time? While election campaigns are most visible in the 4-6 weeks before election day, much has happened in advance of this 30-45 day period. Allow yourself at least three months to a year to plan and implement an election campaign. A B C D F
14. Do you have two or three high profile, high energy citizens to lead your election campaign? Successful elections are citizen led BUT they are not designed and orchestrated by citizen volunteers. Because most citizens don't have campaign experience, they will need to be trained before the campaign begins and guided as it unfolds. You should not "turn over" the campaign to citizens. A B C D F
15. Will administrators maintain a low profile during the election? While they must provide information and respond to questions, they should not be the out-front people during the campaign. They may need some training to better understand the roles they should play. A B C D F
16. Do you have an election data base? A key element in any campaign is the development and management of a data base. You should know things like who voted in the last school election, who is likely to vote this time, who will vote by absentee or mail ballot, and how supportive parents really are. Your data base should tell you these things and enable you to effectively target your messages to the right target at the right time. A B C D F
17. Do you know how people in your community communicate? Think about what has happened during the last decade: Cell phones have replaced land lines for more than one-half of American households; cell phone users are more likely to text than talk; and, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have proliferated. If you are not tapped into these technologies and networks, you are on the outside looking in. A B C D F
18. Do you know your odds? Gone is the time when you could put forth a minimal campaign effort and win. Unless you take steps to plan a comprehensive, research-based campaign, your odds of winning are less than chance--less than 50:50! In many states, the odds are much worse. So, do whatever needs doing to discover your odds before you initiate a campaign. Postponing an election until things are right is a lot easier than coming back to the voters after a defeat. A B C D F

**How to score *The ABC Pre-Election Planner***

1. Convert each circled letter on the ABC-scale to: A = 4; B = 3; C = 2; D = 1; and, F = 0
2. Total the 18 numbers.

3. Add the numbers for items #8 and #16 to the total.

4. Divide the new total by 20. The answer is your “GPA” (grade point average) where 4 = A; 3 = B; 2 = C; 1 = D; and, zero = F. Hence, a 2.0 is a grade of C and a 3.5 is a grade of B+/A-.

- ✓ If your GPA is C (2.0) or less, you should seriously consider delaying your election until you raise your individual item scores, particularly if you scored low on items 3, 5, 8, 11, or 16.
- ✓ If your GPA is between C (2.0) and B (3.0), you should proceed cautiously while making swift and substantial efforts to improve your lowest scores. Attend especially to items 3 and 11.
- ✓ If your GPA is B (3.0) or higher, you can proceed with confidence while continuing to strengthen your individual item scores. Attend especially to item 16.

Your scores on the individual items in *The ABC Pre-Election Planner* identify areas of strength and weakness. Use them to develop your plan and position yourself to effectively implement it.



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