Board Minute – Representation and Responsible Feedback

One of the strengths of a school board is that different people bring different perspectives to the table. Board members come from different communities, professions, and experiences. A student representative adds another important perspective: the experience of attending our schools every day.

Each perspective matters but no one person speaks for everyone who shares something in common with them.

A student representative may share an opinion or something several classmates have discussed. That is useful information. It does not mean all students feel the same way. By the same token, a board member who lives in Grey Eagle may understand that community well, but that does not make that person the spokesperson for every Grey Eagle resident.

There is a meaningful difference between saying: *"Students are upset about this,"* and, *"Three students spoke with me this week and raised the same concern."*

The second statement makes the information more useful in decision-making because we understand where it came from and how broad it may be. One or two comments can still be important. A single experience may identify a problem before it becomes a larger concern. The goal is to give feedback the right weight and then learn more to better understand it.

A student may accurately describe something that happened in a classroom without knowing why a decision was made. A parent may hear that a program was eliminated when it was actually moved or changed. That does not mean anyone is being dishonest. They are sharing what they know from their point of view and what information they have.

When feedback involves staffing, programming, discipline, finances, or other district operations, it may be helpful to ask the appropriate administrator for more information. The purpose is to understand the concern well enough to separate perception, experience, and verified information.

If one person's concern becomes *"people are saying,"* or one student's opinion becomes *"the students think,"* the concern can appear much broader than it really is. That can create a sense of disagreement that may not exist. It can also make people less willing to share concerns. Students, parents, and staff should be able to talk with board members without worrying that one conversation will later be presented as the opinion of an entire group.

When different information is presented, it should be considered on its merits. The goal is not to decide which person to believe first, but to compare what we hear with other perspectives and information that can be verified.

The value of representation comes from having someone at the table who can offer a perspective we may not otherwise hear, ask questions through another lens, and help the us recognize when broader input is needed to better understand an issue.

Feedback allows us to ask better questions before deciding what it means or what to do.

Quick Reference: Before Repeating or Acting on Feedback

- What did I actually hear or observe?
- How many people does this feedback represent?
- Is this one experience, a repeated pattern, or a broader trend?
- What other perspective would help me understand it?
- What information should I verify before reaching a conclusion?

Quick Reference: Remember the Limits of Information

- One person sees only part of the picture.
- Firsthand experience does not always include the reasons behind a decision.
- Secondhand information may lose context as it is repeated.
- A few similar comments do not automatically establish a broader trend.
- People often know their own area well, but may not know what is happening elsewhere.
- Information can be accurate and still be incomplete.