

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Board should emphasize 'team' in its work

I was reading an interview with a college football player after a poor performance on a big stage in a bowl game recently. The player indicated that one of his New Year's resolutions was to use less "I" in his communications and more "we."

Sounds to me like there was some coaching taking place inside that team's locker room, with a coach trying to make the point that a running back's success is dependent upon his offensive linemen. It takes team work to succeed in pretty much any life endeavor.

That's true with boards, too.

- Does your board think in terms of "we" or is

there too much "I" taking place in the board room?

- Do board members put their personal agendas on the back burner to concentrate on what is best for all students?
- Does the board actively work toward consensus, and do individual trustees support board decisions when they are in the minority?
- Do all board members communicate effectively with each other and with the superintendent?

Concentrate on what is most important in your work as a board member (a top-notch education for all students), and the board will deliver as a team. ■

Separate parent hat from board member hat

It is true that board members must often wear two hats when serving.

The trustee wears his board member hat when making policy, for example. But if you are also a parent of a child in the district, you will take off your board member hat and wear your parent hat at times.

How you do this is very important.

If you are a serving board member and your child receives a poor grade on a test, that is not a matter to take up as a board member, but as a parent.

It can be a difficult challenge to keep this in mind: The board role should be kept separate from the parent role, whether it comes to a child's playing time in volleyball, a grade, or which chair he sits in during musical performances by the orchestra.

Even disparaging comments made about a teacher or coach in a group of friends carry weight and can damage reputations when you are a board member.

Always keep in mind that you are a board member when you are out in public, when you attend games and performances, or when you drop by a school for lunch with your child. ■

Encourage board service in your community

You have served the board for many years and now want to step down and let new members govern the district. Because of your commitment to the schools, you want to see that the board is left in good hands so that the schools continue to flourish.

Finding civic-minded individuals can be a challenge in these busy days, so how can the board encourage or even “recruit” new board members to run for office?

Here are some tips:

❑ Let prospective board members get a taste of school board service. Encourage them to attend a board meeting, meet with the superintendent, and spend time with current board members one-on-one.

❑ Use your business contacts and service club memberships to talk up board service. Be honest about the work and its time commitment. A local

business should understand that it benefits from its civic-minded attitudes when it encourages its employees to volunteer their time.

❑ Speak to a classroom about board service. Engage with students on the topic of what they expect from their school board.

❑ Analyze which citizens are most active and productive on board committees. Approach them about a run for office.

❑ Put potential board members on the board’s CC: list. They should receive past meeting agendas, board policies and bylaws, and updates about district priorities.

❑ Distribute a Board Service Commitment form to all those who express interest in board service. This form should be honest about time commitment and the work involved, as well as what is expected from a committed school board member in terms of teamwork. ■

Set parameters before talking compensation with the superintendent

In the Kentucky School Board Association’s Board Room publication article “Negotiating Superintendent Contracts,” KSBA suggests the board establish parameters on what it will offer the superintendent before negotiating matters such as pay and benefits.

“They should establish some parameters for themselves, and say, ‘We believe in this district, here’s a reasonable salary range. We

don’t want to hire anyone for less than this, but we probably can’t go any more than this,’” said Mike Oder, who works with KSBA’s Superintendent Search Service and is a retired superintendent. “Or, ‘We feel like we could offer the following benefits, probably not any additional.’”

For information, <http://www.ksba.org/BoardRoomNegotiatingasuperintendentcontract.aspx>. ■

Create trust for the board in your community

From a big-picture view, what does the community want from its school board? Trust. The community should be able to trust that the board will work at providing students with the type of education they will need to succeed in today’s world.

How can a board work to ensure that this trust is rewarded?

• Ensure that all board members work to create trust and confidence in the district. That takes teamwork.

• Be consistent in what messages the board sends out to its stakeholders. This is a good reason for the board president or the superintendent to be the primary board message-givers.

• Make good decisions. Use your superintendent to research issues, come to the board with a recommendation, deliberate the superintendent’s recommendation, and then make a decision by voting. ■