

From the Board Room

A newsletter for members of the Vermont School Boards Association, 2 Prospect Street, Suite #4, Montpelier VT 05602
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INSIDE

BOARD OPERATIONS TIP	PG. 2
SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS' CIVIC MISSION URGED	PG. 4
VSBIT - WHAT IS IT	PG. 4
PUBLIC SCHOOLS: OF THE PEOPLE	PG. 5
IMPROVING TEACHING	PG. 6
COMMISSION RELEASES FINAL REPORT	PG. 6
THINGS YOUR MAMA NEVER TOLD YOU ABOUT BEING ON A SCHOOL BOARD	PG. 7
GENERATE & MAINTAIN MOMENTUM	PG. 8
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND?	PG. 9
SPRING TRAINING ISN'T JUST FOR BASEBALL	PG. 10
MEMBER TO MEMBER	PG. 11
ROW TOGETHER OR SINK ALONE	PG. 11
ETHICS AND THE SUCCESSFUL BOARD TEAM	PG. 12
07-08 SCHOOL BOARD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	PG. 13
PERSONALITIES AFFECT BOARD SUCCESS	PG. 14

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Articles printed represent diverse points of view and may be controversial in nature. It is the belief of the Association that the democratic process functions best through discussions which challenge and stimulate thinking on the part of the reader. Therefore, materials published present the ideas/beliefs of those who write them and are not necessarily the views or policies of the VSBA unless so stated. This newsletter is distributed at no charge to all members of the Association. Contact the Association by calling 802-223-3580.

If Not School Boards, Then What?

by *Kenneth DeLay, Executive Director of the Colorado Association of School Boards*

Rattling around the rear seat of the education reform express is an unsettling question: Why school boards?

If school boards ever were useful, the critics say, surely that time has now passed. Today we have a cadre of trained administrators and teachers to run our schools. We have challenging students and complex student achievement and demographic data to analyze, hardly the work of a lay board. Moreover, the critics on both the left and the right argue that the base political motives and activities of elected school boards undermine, or even block, efforts to improve our schools.

According to these critics, the idyllic vision many of us have of our agrarian forefathers gathering resources and learning in an isolated community has almost nothing to do with modern American education. Schools and school districts have grown large and money increasingly comes from the state or federal government rather than the local community. Too often, they say, teachers' unions rather than local community leaders drive decisions on our school boards.

Why not invest governing authority in parent and teacher committees in each school, the critics ask? Or, let administrators—the trained professionals—run the school district. Let parents make choices

with their students' dollars, others suggest.

Why not indeed? Why not these or some other option? Why school boards in education?

'Public' Education

The answer to that question must surely begin with a gentle reminder that it is public education. Public education has taken on some baggage in 21st century America, which it did not carry in the 19th century. Public schools must accept everyone, they must make special effort to educate students with disabilities, and they must close that troubling learning gap. Yet one of the basic characteristics of our public schools is no different today than it was 100 years ago: public schools are funded by tax dollars.

Those who spend those dollars must be accountable to taxpayers. There is no principle more basic to the American political psyche than the belief that taxes and their expenditure must rest upon elected representation. Before we scuttle school boards, some thought ought to be devoted to how this basic American principle will play out without locally elected school boards.

We might start by acknowledging that the question "Why school boards?" is better stated, "If not school boards, then what?" Or, to frame that question differ-

(THEN WHAT Continued on page 3...)

Board Operations Tip

Reorganizing the Board After the Election

By Winton Goodrich, VSBA Associate Director

First, make sure all new board members are duly sworn in. The town/city clerk usually performs this function. By law, new board members must take the oath of office and the superintendent notifies the Commissioner of Education within 10 days following the election.



During board reorganization, it is critical to establish an effective system for how the board will operate during the ensuing year. Take particular care when selecting your board chair. Electing an effective chair is critical. Important attributes include electing a board chair who is:

- ♦ impartial;
- ♦ comfortable speaking in public;
- ♦ willing and able to hold board members, administrators, and the public accountable.

Tenure on the board should be considered but should not be the primary influence when voting for the board chair. School boards can not have co-chairs.

Many boards employ a staff person to take board minutes. Sometimes this person is the superintendent's administrative assistant. Other boards hire a paid clerk. Regardless of who takes minutes, they must be made available, in draft version, to members of the public within 5 days following each meeting.

Board meetings, and meetings of any sub-committee of the board, must be publicly warned and minutes taken as well.

Once the usual and customary appointments of chair, vice chair, and clerk have been completed, many boards also identify committee responsibilities. This is the time when the board decides how meetings will be conducted throughout

the year. All boards are required by law to operate under Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure. However, boards with fewer than 12 members may conduct board business using a more informal system call Robert's Rules for Small Boards.

Decisions, made by boards using traditional Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure, must be preceded by a motion, a second, ensuing deliberation, and, finally, a vote. This process can be slow and somewhat cumbersome. However, when this process is followed everyone knows where each board member stands on an issue. The board chair should discourage abstentions for issues that are difficult. The only time abstentions are appropriate is when a perceived conflict of interest can be substantiated and agreed upon by the board. In potentially volatile decisions, the board member, involved in a perceived conflict of interest, should absent themselves from both deliberation and voting on the issue.

Robert's Rules for Small Boards provides a more informal operating style. The board chair facilitates deliberation until it appears consensus has been reached. There may or may not be a formal motion made. A second on the motion is not required. The board chair often votes along with fellow board members. However, this style

of board operation can be confusing. There must be tacit agreement during the board reorganization that silence during consensus decision making means support. The clerk must carefully record the action taken by the board. This operating style often encourages members of the public to begin deliberating with the board, blurring lines of authority, and may cause meetings to get out of control.

In Vermont, there are 46 supervisory unions, 12 supervisory districts, 2 independent technical center boards, and 2 interstate districts. Each town in a supervisory union elects its own local board members. The local board runs a school or is responsible for tuitioning students to other schools, within or outside Vermont. Three members from each town, which operates a school, serve on the supervisory union board. Tuitioning towns are only allowed one representative on the supervisory union board.

Each local school board, at the annual reorganization meeting, appoints board members who will serve on the supervisory union board. These supervisory union representatives are the only board members eligible to vote at supervisory union board meetings.

Congratulations on your current or past success in being elected to serve on your school board(s). You represent one of 1460 school board members statewide that comprise 284 school boards.

Good luck and good skill to your board as you begin the very important work of providing oversight and direction for education in your community. 🚌

ently, how will our democracy govern its public schools?

In many of today's reforms, we see school governance migrating away from the local school board. Most notable lately has been the federal No Child Left Behind Act. This far-reaching federal law puts many governance decisions into the hands of the United States Congress or the President acting through his Secretary of Education. Similarly, state legislatures have become increasingly active in their efforts to regulate curriculum, standards, student safety, and many other aspects of our local public schools. Some states have vested control of city school systems in elected mayors.

We also see at work in today's reforms a more basic and less thoughtful notion of democracy. At least some parents, for example, might think control over a "voucher" beats hands-down control over a single vote for school board members. Many parents believe the only "local control" that matters is the control parents exercise over their child's education program.

It is worth noting, however, that these parental choice forms of "democracy" do not escape regulation by elected officials. And if one of these systems is not working well, the legislature will always create more regulations to "fix" the problem.

What we find, therefore, is that local school boards are only one way for a democracy to govern its public schools. At the end of the governing chain, even for things such as vouchers, there is always an elected official, someone accountable to voters.

Too often arguments supporting public education rely on the unstated premise

that the only true public education is found in schools governed by local school boards. Not surprisingly, these arguments sway almost no one outside the existing system. Most of the people supporting other alternatives think that the democracy embedded in a state legislature, governor's office, mayor's office, or even parent and teacher committees is a perfectly acceptable form of democracy and entirely consistent with the ideals of this nation.

In short, in response to the question "If not school boards, then what?" a gentle reminder that we are talking about public schools is not enough. It is a good start.

The governance of our public schools will certainly be by elected public officials. However, if we want those elected public officials to be school boards, we must find a better argument than the fact that they are elected. School boards

must bring a value to public education that other elected officials do not bring.

Adding Value to Local Control

Part of that added value of locally elected school boards comes simply from grounding governance in the communities governed. Look at almost any two school boards and you will find many challenges that are similar and

many that are dissimilar. Issues as disparate as growth or decline, large or small, high or low socioeconomic status, conservative or liberal, rural or urban, and many other differences divide our many communities.

The value of local control is in part that the elected governing board can address these unique challenges and values in a way specific to each community. Although somewhat overworked,

the axiom that one size does not fit all is true in many ways. Even the critics of school boards can hardly deny the value of at least some local control.

Chester Finn, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation that seeks to advance education reform, vigorously argues that school boards are about protecting interests in the system, especially

interests of staff and teachers' unions. In a nutshell, Finn's argument is that, in practice, local boards are neither elected by nor represent the interest of the larger local community. We need not concede Finn's point to accept his premise: local boards add value by representing a local community only if they truly govern in the interest of that community. Local is as local does. In other words, if we want local control for our local school boards, we must exercise it for all our citizens, even the odd ducks.

This is where the rubber meets the road. This is the place where we find out whether school boards genuinely add value to our educational institutions or do not. Even Chester Finn acknowledges the need for "control" in local schools. He simply discounts that there is any value in investing democratic governance in local school systems.

If we mean to prove him wrong, we must do more than say he is wrong. We must seize that control and exercise it in a way that makes a difference in each of our communities. We must show that local democracy really does make a difference. 🚌

If not school boards... than what?

If not school boards... than what?

Excerpted from the Maine School Management Association Newsletter January 2007

Support for Schools' Civic Mission Urged

Charles Haynes, senior scholar and director of education programs at the First Amendment Center, is "frustrated and angered by the widespread demonizing of public schools in the culture wars—on talk radio, on the Internet, and especially in direct-mail, fund-raising letters."

"To take a few bad stories and label all public schools as godless and amoral—one fund-raising letter even called public schools 'child abuse'—is not only wrong. It is dangerous," Haynes said.

So how can school boards respond to such attacks? Haynes offered some advice during the NSBA Leadership Conference Jan. 28 in Washington, D.C.

"Resist the temptation to become warriors yourselves," he said. "As difficult as it may be, public school leaders should strive to be fair, honest brokers" and should make every effort "to give people on all sides a place at the table."

That's what happened when the Mustang, Okla., school district found itself under attack after the superintendent

canceled a nativity pageant at a school assembly a couple of years ago.

At the time, the district didn't have any policies on religion, but "Mustang had the wisdom to turn a crisis into an opportunity," Haynes said.

The school board created a task force of religious leaders, parents, and educators to find common ground on a comprehensive religious liberty policy and provided training to teachers and administrators to ensure it would be properly implemented.

Instead of ignoring attacks or hoping they will go away, Haynes urged school leaders to make sure schools are striving to fulfill the purpose of public education—"to prepare our young people to be engaged, informed, and committed citizens."

He advised school boards to take their civic mission seriously by articulating and implementing a clear, compelling vision for:


- developing students' "civic character," including "the knowledge, skills, virtues, and commitment necessary for engaged and responsible citizenship";

- developing students' moral character; and
- protecting the religious liberty rights of all students and teach students about religion when appropriate.

Haynes described how Ridgewood Middle School in Arnold, Mo., a failing school in a poor community, benefited in many ways after adopting character education six years ago.

Academic performance and attendance have improved. Disciplinary referrals are down by more than 70 percent, and the student retention rate has dropped to zero.

Reading and math are important, Haynes said, but "shouldn't we be paying more attention to what kinds of human beings do the math and read the books?"

After all, Haynes said, "Public schools are the lifeblood of democracy—places where people of many faiths, cultures, and races learn how to live with even our deepest differences." 

*Excerpted from
NSBA School Board News
February 2007*

"VSBIT"-WHAT IS IT

by Joe Zimmerman, VSBIT Executive Director

VSBIT wishes to take this opportunity to welcome and introduce itself to all new school board members.

VSBIT, the Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust is a non-profit corporation owned by member school districts through out the state of Vermont. VSBIT was formed in 1978 by a group of dedicated school officials who wanted to find a solution to the rising cost of unemployment insurance. That original group, over twenty-nine years ago, created VSBIT's first program, a self-insured, low cost unemployment plan.

Today, VSBIT's Board of Directors is comprised of five individuals: a school board member, a superintendent, a business manager and two members at-large. The Board and staff oversee a variety of innovative risk management programs and services. Since the beginning, it has been VSBIT's goal to only maintain programs that are beneficial to its members. In 1994, VSBIT and the Vermont-NEA joined together to form the Vermont Education Health Initiative (VEHI). Today, VEHI manages the self-funded health insurance program that VSBIT started in 1984. Listed below are some of the programs and services available through VSBIT, VEHI or VSBIT's School Management Resource Center (SMRC):

VSBIT
Unemployment Program
Health Promotion and Wellness
Section 125, Cafeteria Plans
Multi-Line School Program

VEHI
Health Insurance Program
Dental Insurance Program
Long Term Disability

SMRC
Human Resource Management
Physical Plant Management
Educational Workshops

Contact the VSBIT office at 802-223-5040 or visit VSBIT's web-site at www.vsbitorg if you wish further information.



Public Schools: Of the People, By the People, and For the People

In an age when public schools face criticism by the press and by elected officials, reminders of the importance of public education are hard to find. A recent reminder, however, comes from the Center on Education Policy (CEP), in their new report, "Why We Still Need Public Schools: Public Education for the Common Good." The CEP report describes the missions of public education and explains why public education is provided not only by the public but also for the public. To treat education as a "private consumer good," the report emphasizes, is to miss the point of public education and to lose out on its benefits.

Democratic Missions

The CEP report describes six missions of public schools, found in public education's historical roots and still applicable today:

- To provide universal access to free education
- To guarantee equal opportunities for all children
- To improve social conditions
- To unify a diverse population
- To prepare people for citizenship in a democratic society
- To prepare people to become economically self-sufficient

Too often, the report notes, people focus only on the final reason and thus see education as a private good for which one must compete. This view of education forgets the democratic ideals underlying public education, embodied in the first two missions.

One of the rationales of early supporters of public education was the im-

portance of education in sustaining democracy. Completely private education, like any other private good, becomes concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest and most powerful citizens, shutting out less advantaged citizens from a place in public life; if America is to truly be a place where any child can dream of growing up to be President, then public education is a necessity.

To provide this equal opportunity for all students, schools take on the substantial burden of alleviating and rectifying social inequalities. Public schools, the CEP report notes, are expected to feed low-income children breakfast and lunch, provide before- and after-school care, prevent substance abuse and violence, address children's health issues, and act as community centers for children and families.

Creating Citizens, Benefiting from Citizenship

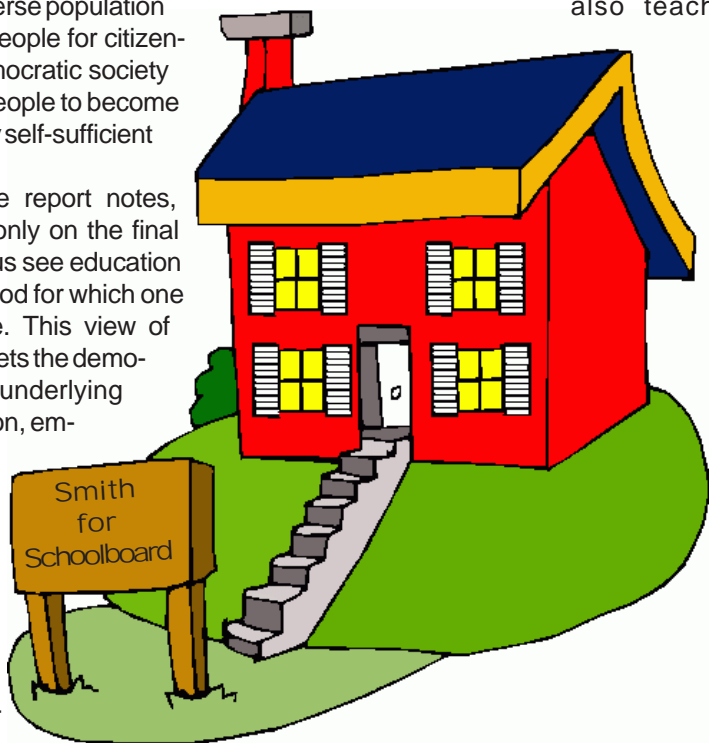
The ideals of democracy and citizenship are tied up in public education, explains the CEP report. Schools not only produce informed voters, but they also teach

students how to engage in dialogue and debate about important issues. Schools can also promote other responsibilities of citizenship by promoting community action and volunteerism among students. To produce effective citizens, all students, regardless of background, must have access to education, and public education is the most egalitarian way to provide that education.

In addition to producing better citizens and stronger democracy, public schools can benefit from citizenship and democracy. Public schools and local school boards provide a democratic forum for people to decide what their children should learn and how they should learn it. Government, at all levels from local to national, provides a coordinating role in making sure that all students receive a high-quality education, but also makes sure that citizens have a voice in how that education is provided. "Without public schools," the report warns, "citizens would lack clear channels to influence state or national education policy. There would be no guarantees that any of the public missions of public education would remain a priority."

Help All Schools

Many problems do exist in public education, the report admits, ranging from poor leadership, to inadequate funding, to the constraints that come from serving many children who live in poverty. However, the report concludes that this is no reason to abandon public education. "The answer is not to do away with public schools or give up on the ideals that have guided them for two centuries. Nor is the answer to accept public schools as they are. The answer is to encourage reforms that will help all schools live up to these ideals." In a functioning democracy, few things could be more fundamental. 🚌



Source:
Access Education Finance Litigation
www.schoolfunding.info

Improving Teaching: New Report Highlights Lessons From Other Nations

One-third of new teachers leave within three years and half are gone within five years. Those with the best academic qualifications and achievement are most likely to leave. (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). If school systems were graded on the job they do at getting, keeping, and supporting great teachers, many would get grades of C or D. Other nations face the same challenges – but do better at attracting, supporting and retaining effective teachers. What can the US learn from abroad?



To help answer that question, the Aspen Institute Education Program, based in Washington, DC, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, based in Paris, co-sponsored an international seminar to examine how eight different nations are working to strengthen teaching.

Lessons from Abroad: Teaching Policy to Improve Student Learning, a special


report commissioned by the Aspen Institute and appearing as an insert in the February 14th issue of *Education Week*, describes promising examples relevant to the United States education system. These include robust programs to attract and support new teachers in Switzerland and Japan; systematic support for established teachers to improve their teaching in Ontario Canada and Japan; and new approaches to career progression and pay for expert teachers in Singapore, England, and Sweden.

The report author, Lynn Olson, managing editor of special projects at *Education Week*, draws on the seminar deliberations and international examples and reflects on how the US might develop teacher career systems that progress in stages from novice to expert, with different expectations, responsibilities, and compensation at each stage. Recognizing that staying in one job or even one profession is increasingly rare, Olson also looks at how school systems can both encourage highly effective teachers to stay longer and make the best use of teachers who will be in the profession only a few years.

Many school districts and states are exploring new approaches to strengthening the teaching profession. In the

reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, more attention to improving teacher quality is promised. This makes today an opportune time to learn from other nation's successes. As former Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley states in the report, "my hope is that in this new year there will be a national conversation among leaders at all levels—members of congress, governors, state legislators, school board members, educators, and others – about effective federal, state, and local policies to foster and reward teaching excellence."



To read *Lessons from Abroad: Teaching Policy to Improve Student Learning* and for more information and research on international teaching policy, including profiles and analyses of teaching policies in the nations highlighted in the report, please visit the Aspen Institute website at <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/education/teachingpolicy>. 

Source:
The Aspen Institute
www.aspeninstitute.org

Commission Releases Final Report for NCLB Reauthorization

Recommendations to Serve as Blueprint for Change

The Commission on No Child Left Behind released its final recommendations for the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The 75 recommendations in the report focus on making sure teachers and principals are effective, improving accountability measures, effective school improvement and student options, rigorous standards, and strengthening high schools. "We hope this report will serve as a blueprint for

Congress and the Administration as they work to reauthorize NCLB this year," said Secretary Tommy Thompson. "The commission worked tirelessly and in a bi-partisan manner to come up with a comprehensive package of reforms that we believe will significantly improve the law."

"It is our hope that the administration and Congress will build on what we have

learned about NCLB in its first five years," said Governor Roy Barnes. "We believe our recommendations will help improve academic achievement for our Nation's students and, most importantly, quicken the closing of the achievement gap."

When it was first passed in 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act was one of the most significant steps taken by the

REPORT Continued on page 7...

(...REPORT continued from page 6)

Federal government to focus on raising student achievement for all children while addressing the achievement gaps that separate disadvantaged students from their non-disadvantaged peers. The Commission's charge was to identify the successes of NCLB as well as its challenges and problems and to develop solutions that will improve the law's impact on raising student achievement and closing these achievement gaps. These recommendations were produced through a bipartisan independent process that included 12 public hearings and roundtables around the country and over 10,000 emails, submissions of written testimony, meetings and letters from those with thoughts on how to improve the law.

Most of the Commission's recommendations can be grouped into 5 broad categories:

- Ensuring Teachers and Principals are Effective at Improving Student Achievement
- Accelerating Progress through Accurate and Fair Accountability Measures
- Effective School Improvement and Quality Student Options
- Rigorous Standards Tied to College and Workplace Readiness
- Strengthening and Reforming High Schools

It is expected that Congress will begin work to reauthorize NCLB this year. The Commission will work with Congress, the Administration, the education community and the general public throughout the reauthorization process to make the case for our recommendations. In the coming weeks, the Commission will be announcing a schedule of events and continuing analysis and

research that will be conducted to support the reauthorization process.

The entire Commission report can be read, ordered and downloaded at www.nclbcommission.org.

The Commission on No Child Left Behind is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Spencer Foundation. This document is published to communicate the results of the Commission's work. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in the Commission's documents are entirely those of the author(s) and should not be attributed in any manner to the donors. 🚌

Source: The Aspen Institute
www.nclbcommission.org

Things Your Mama Never Told You About Being on a School Board

Lorna Jimerson, VSBA President 1997-1999

With "budget season" winding down in most of our districts, school board members across the state are gearing up for the next hurdle—the showdown of Town Meeting. For me, this is always a time of self-reflection and an opportunity to think critically about the past year of school board service. Some of us will be leaving our local boards, while others will be greeting newly elected members soon. Thus, we have a chance as veteran board members to help new school board members learn—learn about issues *and* learn to cope.

School board service can be a trying experience, though certainly worthwhile. There are a few things, however, I wish someone had warned me about when I first took office years ago. Thus, "*Things Your Mama Never Told You*" about school board service and some sug-

gestions about warnings to offer as you welcome new members:

1. **You will have enemies.** No matter how thoughtful you are in your deliberations and decisions, almost every vote you take will anger someone. Might as well accept the fact that someone will always be outraged about your actions. Don't worry—tough skin does develop over time.
2. **Almost every issue is more complex than you thought.** As a private citizen, opinions were easy. As school board members, with a much more comprehensive understanding of the inner workings of the school and the district, even the most seemingly simple issue becomes (sometimes, ridiculously) complex. Considering the intricate implications of policies, budgets, and planning is part of our

job. Community members seldom appreciate all the complexities. More knowledge does not lead to easier decision-making, though it may lead to better decisions.

3. **You are now a member of the establishment.** No matter what your pre-board ideals were, community members will now perceive you as part of the educational establishment (whatever that is). We are often regarded with suspicion. Many apparently believe that board members no longer live in the community, are exempt from paying taxes, and have little regard for the welfare of children. This came as a shock to me personally, and continues to challenge my self-identity. The "establishment" label can feel very awkward.

(MAMA continued on page 9...)



Generate & Maintain Momentum

LAURA SOARES, VSBA President 2001-2005

Why are some endeavors successful while others fail to gain momentum; or get off to a good start but fail to go anywhere? Are there underlying principles which help ensure success? During my tenure on three different boards over the last decade, I have come to believe there are certain things a board can do to increase the chances of success in any undertaking. Whether you are trying to pass a bond, have a budget approved, gain support for a new program, choose a new leader, change curriculum, or negotiate a contract, the following principles can serve as a guide.

First, I have found that while it might be easy to get an idea off the ground, the only way to keep it going is for the project to have a champion. At least one person must be the driving force behind the endeavor. Having someone who understands the long term goal, is determined to see it through, can tap the necessary resources to move forward, and look after all the details is essential for success. Without such an individual, a great idea is likely to stay just that.

Second, the process used to gain consensus and determine a course of action is critical. In fact, the process is often as important as the actual outcome. It is essential all interested parties feel they have a voice in the final decision. This requires time, information, and willingness to incorporate the ideas and concerns of all those involved. Information must be available to all who are interested. It is easy for individuals spearheading the undertaking to forget that others do not have access to the same data as they do. The board must actively share all information and educate the public. They must provide the opportunities for questions, concerns, and new ideas. It is important that all viewpoints expressed be treated with respect and seriously considered. This isn't always easy, as many times when a board holds a public meeting few citizens find the time to attend. The board must

make every effort to invite the public into the process, however. It is critical for community members to know their input is welcome, even if they don't actually take the time to get involved.

Third, it is important to realize that while every person will approach a situation from their own perspective, everyone is trying to do the right thing, especially when it comes to our children. The goal is to prevent people from seeing themselves on different sides of an issue. Instead, we need to see ourselves as all wanting the best outcome for our children and their education, even if we differ about how to accomplish this goal. When we hear someone say something we disagree with, we need to step back and remember they are also trying to do the right thing. The goal is to find the common ground and move forward toward a common goal.

Fourth, always correct misinformation. If there are rumors circulating, letters to the editor, newspaper articles, or statements made in public that are incorrect or incomplete, it is vital that they be addressed head-on. It is the job of the board to ensure accurate and complete information is getting out to the public. If not, the public will assume what they are hearing is accurate, and once accepted as true, it becomes very difficult to change people's perceptions.

Fifth, remember that perception is more important than reality. What people think is happening needs to be taken seriously and addressed. If people believe the board is hiding something, even if you are not, you must correct the perception. It is unwise to think that because you know the truth, you will be vindicated in the end. Again, it comes down to frequent and open communication between the board and the community. The goal is to ensure the public perceptions are in line with the realities of the situation.

Sixth, follow up with every single person who contacts you. If a person takes the time to express an idea or an opinion, negative or positive, their participation should be acknowledged. There have been instances in my community when the personal contact between a board member and a community member with an opposing viewpoint has resulted in a change of perspective. People who once were adversaries actually became supporters of an idea because a member of the board, listened to their ideas, provided them with a more complete picture, and brought them into the process of building a viable solution. Personal contact can make all the difference and will help the board gain the respect of the community.

Seventh, be visible and proactive. Promote what is going on in the schools and continually invite feedback from all perspectives. This is true whether everything is going well or you are in the middle of a problem. Citizens should be aware of the progress schools are making, as well as the problems they face and the challenges ahead. They need to trust that school leaders are honest with the community and taking the lead in ensuring our schools are rising to the challenge of educating students. Citizens need to know what boards are up to, and not be left to wonder who's serving on the board and what it is they do. Boards continually working to strengthen their relationship with the community improves the chances that when difficulties arise, the community will be behind the board, not calling for their resignations.

In my experience as a board member, following these seven principles (or at least trying to) has resulted in keeping the community better informed, encouraging broader participation, building trust between the board and wider community, and ensuring greater success with our endeavors. 🚌

4. **Acting as a member of a board is very different from acting as an individual.** Many board members enter into board service with definite ideas about what should be done, only to discover that acting as a board member impinges on their power as an individual. Only decisions made by a board count. For many of us, at some point, our own individually held beliefs have been ignored, or worse, voted down, by the majority of our fellow members. This can be a humbling experience.
5. **School board duty always involves more time than you ever imagined (shhhh).** As I encourage others to run for office, I always need to carefully deal with the time issue. I don't want to discourage good citizens from participating. Exercising local control, however, entails multiple hours of discussion and listening to community members. This greatly increases the number of board meetings and their length. Caffeine is helpful.
6. **The pace of progress is verrrrrry slow.** School board work involves a wide variety of activities. For example, we work towards resolving problems, implementing new strategies, strengthening community involvement, improving academics, overseeing capital projects. Schools and districts are intricate organizations and, as in all complex organizations, change is never straight-forward. Progress is possible — but almost never immediate. Patience is a necessary ingredient for board survival.
7. **The most difficult challenge as a school board member is enlarging your “circle of concern.”** This “warning” overlaps with many of the others above, but I believe, presents the most daunting of personal school board challenges. In my pre-board life, I was concerned, as a parent, primarily with the well being of my own children. What happened in a

particular grade level or in a specific subject area occupied my advocacy efforts as it related to my children. As a local board member, I am forced to confront that what is best for my own child, at times, may not be in the best interests of all children. To serve the community, my circle of concern necessarily had to enlarge to include all those in the district.

For those of us on VSBA Board of Directors, we are confronted with yet another expansion of concern. At our Board meetings, we have the opportunity to hear from fellow board members from other parts of the state. This has been an invaluable experience for me, and I believe, for others. Perspectives on problems, proposed solutions, and implications of state-wide policies can change as viewed from the perspective of *all* children in the state. There have been instances when a specific VSBA position does not coincide with what is best for my own home community, but after careful consideration I realize it may benefit the majority of students throughout our state. This can create some strange, awkward moments. Thankfully, this does not occur often. And gratefully, our discussions are always civil and respectful. I have found that there is much insight to be gained from expanding perspectives with fellow board members.

8. **All is not grim.** My Mama never told me, either, about the rewards of school board membership and of community service in general. I'll opt to save that for a future reminiscence, but I don't want to imply that all is grim in school board land. I do think, however, that there may be a need for new and veteran board members to band together for mutual support. Perhaps a school board support group?

Remember as you prepare yourself for the potential umbrage of Town Meeting—you are not alone and the assaults are seldom fatal. Good luck! 🚗

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND?

Resistance to the No Child Left Behind Act's (NCLB) requirement that all students take the same reading tests, even those struggling to learn English, is growing in Virginia school districts with large immigrant populations. Recently the U.S. Department of Education (ED) threatened Virginia with sanctions, including withholding federal funds, if it failed to enforce the NCLB testing requirements. The Virginia Department of Education had sought an exemption for another year, contending that giving a test written in English to students who are recent immigrants is unfair. However, ED denied the state's request on the ground Virginia has known about NCLB's guidelines for some time and has had time to prod schools into compliance. School boards in Harrisonburg, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Arlington counties have recently signaled their intent to defy the NCLB. Other school districts are considering following suit.

Those boards have passed resolutions saying they will continue to evaluate all students' reading proficiency, but will only administer the state's grade-level Standards of Learning tests to students who have an adequate grasp of English, as determined by teachers and staff. Several school districts intend to continue using an alternate test to measure the progress of non-native English speakers. ED Secretary Margaret Spellings has accused Virginia of “foot dragging,” and insists the testing provision, the law's Standards Clause, is a necessary measure to counter “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” She says, “It's time to remember that yes, Virginia, there is a Standards Clause.” Secretary Spellings' comments have provoked ire of local school boards. “We're all so angry,” says Arlington County School Board chairwoman Libby Garvey. She contends the required test is a “painful

(NCLB Continued on page 10...)



Spring Training Isn't Just for Baseball!

By Winton Goodrich, VSBA Associate Director

Each spring about 250 rookie school board members are elected to the big leagues of school board service. The difference between board service and professional baseball (other than the alleged use of steroids and amphetamines in MLB) is ball players acquire skills and experience in high school, college, and the minor leagues. School board members get yanked out of the stands with little or no experience and thrown into pressure situations with few skills and no training.

So here's how a rookie can become a real team player

and your school board meet the challenges of peak public performance. Step up to the plate and attend one of the Vermont School Boards Association 3Rs (Roles-Responsibilities-Relationships) workshops listed below:

Tuesday, <u>May 27</u>	5:00-9:00 PM	Lyndon State College
Monday, <u>April 2</u>	5:00-9:00 PM	Wallingford Elementary School
Monday, <u>April 9</u>	5:00-9:00 PM	Green Mountain UHS (Chester)
Saturday, <u>April 28</u>	9:00-3:00 PM	Hampton Inn, Colchester
Saturday, <u>May 12</u>	9:00-3:00 PM	Montpelier VSBA Office
Tuesday, <u>May 29</u>	5:30-8:30 PM	15 VIT sites (statewide)



Step into the VSBA on-deck circle with a veteran board member. Bring the whole team to a venue near you. VSBA always fields a nice mix of new and not so new board members who attend board development workshops.

New game. Want to become a board chair who can consistently pitch meetings like a pro? Time to get out of the dugout and hone your meeting management skills at the school board chair workshop scheduled for Wednesday night, May 2, 6:30-8:30 PM at one of the 15 Vermont Interactive Television sites near you.

Register for all workshops online today at www.vtvsba.org Come warm up with major leaguers. Stretch your mind and we'll send you into the game with the right skills and knowledge so your board can hit consistent homeruns and score big points with your voters. Good luck as Vermont starts a new season of school board leadership! 🚌

NCLB continued from page 9

and humiliating experience" for children who haven't grasped English. Reggie Felton, lobbyist for the National School Boards Association (NSBA), predicts similar disagreements will arise in other states that have many students who are not proficient in English. NSBA has asked that ED grant each state flexibility "for real-life situations to

ensure that the test is valid and reliable for each student." In Arizona, where there are many Latino immigrants, school officials also are grappling with testing language learners. "We believe that English language-learner students come to school with different levels of competency," says Panfilo Contreras, executive director of the Arizona School Boards Association. "They may not be

proficient in their own language, let alone English."

ED has informed Fairfax County that it will withhold more than \$17 million from Fairfax County schools if the system continues to defy a federal mandate to give reading tests to thousands of immigrant children. 🚌

Soure: NSBA Legal CLips

Member to Member

We realize the value of board members networking, asking and answering questions of one another. We have added a Member to Member page on our website. This page can be accessed through our homepage www.vtvsba.org. Select the Member to Member link.


New Question:

This is a question posed by fellow board members. If you have an answer, please submit one.

How is your district impacted financially by the Catamount Health Plan? Posted 1/10/07

Submitted answers:

- * Our district (Westford) is not immediately impacted by the Catamount Plan but we could be impacted based on the number of less than FTE's that we engage in. Our fellow district (Essex Jct) will probably be impacted more due to the higher number of less than fte's that they hire. Based on this plan, we will (all districts) at some point or another be impacted by the ramifications of this plan. Posted 1/15/07
- * Catamount Health Tax is approximately \$15,000 in our budget this year: crossing guards, subs and seasonal employees. We are asking the legislature for help in dealing with this. Posted 1/15/07
- * It cost us about \$8,000 for subs and part-timers. Even though they are part time proportional payments are required. Posted 1/15/07
- * Not Affected Posted 1/23/07
- * We have not as yet been advised by administrators of any effect. Most of our employees have access, although not all of the nonteaching staff take advantage of it. Perhaps the subsidy allowed under the law will encourage more participation: that could raise our costs somewhat. Posted 1/23/07
- * Our district gives support staff a significant amount in an "HSA" that far exceed the \$365/yr Catamount fee. Currently, this would not count as health insurance and we would have to pay the fee. We have talked to Sen. McDonald (on Ed Committee) and he says that this was unforeseen and there will be technical changes to correct this. Posted 1/23/07

For your information... the following two websites hold a great deal of information regarding the Catamount Health Plan. [VSBIT \(www.vsb.it\)](http://www.vsb.it) and the [Legislature \(http://www.leg.state.vt.us/HealthCare/catamount.htm\)](http://www.leg.state.vt.us/HealthCare/catamount.htm). 

Row Together or Sink Alone

Education is the foundation of our democracy. Serving on a school board is a responsibility that requires individuals to focus on the public's interests, rather than personal agendas, according to Tammy Hall, a former school board member and director for the Montana School Board Association who is an internationally known speaker, columnist and radio personality.

"You can't influence those you offend," Hall told school board members at a pre-convention workshop. Dissension and conflict among adults on a school board doesn't lead to a focus on the public's interest in the achievement of children.

Hall described different personality types and provided suggestions about working as a board team and with an administration.

In assessing their own personalities, conference-goers took a trivia test and a personality inventory. Hall helped her audi-

ence understand that recognizing the personalities on a school board can reinforce each person's strengths and avoid each person's pitfalls.

Even with self-awareness about the relationship of personalities to board effectiveness it is inevitable that difficult people on the school board or in the audience at school board meetings will create frustration, Hall said. When dealing with difficult people, school leaders should remember that "these are not diverse personalities, these are personalities out of control due to one or more one or more of the following: insecurity, arrogance, mental instability or irresponsibility," Hall explained.

Hall offered no perfect solutions, but suggested school board members temper themselves and "practice reactions and statements."


Belligerent people should be allowed their fair time; board members should not inter-

rupt them and should use their names. Be firm and friendly.

"Talkers" are people who don't listen. Give them their fair time, acknowledge their ideas, respond to them with facts and avoid arguments. Thank them for any ideas.

"Protesters" need to be asked to solve problems.

"Saboteurs" take subtle potshots to make others look silly. Board members should ask questions, such as "Wow, that sounds like a put down, was it?"

"Remember, giving in to resentment is giving someone free rental space in your brain," Hall concluded. 

*Excerpted from
Wisconsin School News
March 2007*

Ethics and the Successful Board Team

The successful functioning of the school board depends upon the board working as a team and individual board members acting appropriately in relation to the team, according to Kathryn Blumsack, director of board development for the Maryland Association of Boards of Education.

What do boards need to do to function successfully? According to Blumsack, they need to have a unity of purpose - a shared vision. "This is the fundamental building block of board effectiveness," she said.

Boards should also have a clear understanding of their role. "The board is responsible for providing overall direction in the district. If the board doesn't have the big picture, who will?" asked Blumsack.

"Effective boards understand the distinctions between board and staff roles, and they refrain from performing management functions that are the responsibility of the superintendent and staff," said Blumsack. "When there is a lack of clarity between roles, you need to talk."

The board's role is to set direction (identify the intended results), ensure accountability (monitor and assess actual results), establish structures (set standards for operating and adopt policies that facilitate governance) and provide support (align resources through the budgetary process). The superintendent's role is to establish the means by which the board's

policies and goals are to be carried out and to make recommendations to the board.

"The board and superintendent should work together as a team and have a relationship of trust," said Blumsack. "Effective boards operate with integrity and trust. If trust is lost, it is the hardest thing to get back."

Effective boards are focused and consistent. "Sometimes it means being courageous and focused enough to get rid of 'sacred cows' - to say "no" we are not going to do that," she suggested.

Blumsack said effective boards also take collective responsibility for the board's performance. "Effective boards participate in professional development and commit the time and energy necessary to be informed and effective leaders. They understand the district's vision, policies and guidelines, the educational environment in their district, and make the best educational decisions for the children and the community they serve," explained Blumsack.

What can individual board members do to help contribute to the success of the board? According to Blumsack, board members need to govern with dignity and understand the implications of their demeanor and behavior. "People care not only about what you say but how you say it. They care about how you treat each

other, staff and the community in the process," she advised.


Board members should also keep confidential matters confidential and be prepared to do the business of the board. "Being prepared," according to Blumsack, "is doing your homework, working hard,

committing the time and energy to be effective, thinking about the future and understanding the needs of students."

Blumsack reminded board members they have power only when they are sitting together with the rest of the board. "You have no power when you are by yourself ... When you are alone, you are just another citizen."

Members of the public often confront individual board members with concerns they have about the schools. Blumsack offered these suggestions for handling these situations:

1. Listen. "People want a sounding board and to be heard," said Blumsack.
2. Encourage the individual to follow the established process for handling concerns (the appropriate chain of command).
3. Assure the individual that the superintendent will be informed.
4. Express appreciation to the individual for voicing the concern.

According to Blumsack, board members should listen but be clear that it is not their role to personally deal with the concern. "If you say, 'I'll take care of it,' what are you saying? You are saying that you are fighting the fire, and that is not your job. You are moving from doing your job to doing someone else's job. If you violate the 'system,' you can throw the entire system off balance." 

*Excerpted from
Wisconsin School News
March 2007*

"Effective boards operate with integrity and trust. If trust is lost, it is the hardest thing to get back."

"You have no power when you are by yourself ... When you are alone, you are just another citizen."

2007-2008 School Board Professional Development

3/27/07	3R @ Lyndon State	9/17/07	Addison Regional Meeting
4/2/07	3R @ Wallingford Elementary	9/19/07	Bennington/Rutland Regional Meeting
4/9/07	3R @ Green Mtn UHS	9/24/07	Franklin/Lamoille Regional Meeting
4/28/07	3R @ Colchester Hampton Inn	9/25/07	Preparing the Budget @ VIT
5/2/07	School Board Chair @ VIT	10/16/07	Superintendent Evaluation @ VIT
5/12/07	3R @ Montpelier-VSBA Office	11/1-2/07	Annual Conference @ Capitol Plaza
5/29/07	3R @ VIT	12/4/07	Conducting Board Hearings @ VIT
9/4/07	Chittenden/Grand Isle Regional Meeting	1/7/08	Budgeting PR @ VIT
9/5/07	Orange/Washington Regional Meeting	2/6/08	Improving Board Operations @ VIT
9/10/07	Essex/Caledonia/Orleans Regional Meeting	3/10/08	Board Member Swap Shop @ VIT
9/11/07	Windsor/Windham Regional Meeting	4/16/08	Governance Options and Enrollment Projections @ VIT

Workshop Descriptions:

3R (Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships)

If you've recently been elected to the school board, you're one of approximately 250 new board members who have assumed the responsibility for overseeing the delivery of high quality education for students in your community. If you want to assure your success as you take on this important leadership role, and you'd like to acquire new skills and more knowledge, turning to your state association for assistance is a great first step to help you hit the ground running.

School Board Chair

The board chair role is critical to the effectiveness of the board and the overall leadership team. The board chair must be well organized, run crisp meetings, develop a strong collaborative relationship with the superintendent, and be able to read the pulse of the school and community. If you're a new board chair or just want to increase your board leadership skills, then plan to participate

Regional Meeting

VSBA, like all membership organizations, depends on participation from you — local school board members — for its strength and vitality. The primary purpose of VSBA's regional meetings is to provide you the opportunity to provide important input and representation to the Association by electing members from your region to serve on the VSBA Board of Directors and Resolutions Committee. VSBA Board provides direction and support for the programs and services offered to the member boards, while the Resolutions Committee recommends positions

on various issues that the Association membership acts upon at the Annual Meeting. Please join us at your regional meeting to discuss ideas and issues and to help shape the Association's future.

Preparing the Budget

Agenda includes: Preparing the groundwork, Decide on a budget advocacy strategy, Budget Buddies, Key Communicators Group, Getting the public on your side before you need them, Analyze key cost drivers, Health insurance, Special education, Per pupil expenditures, Common Level of Appraisal, sing a budget development interactive template, Linking budget development to Act 68 Action Plan priorities, Connecting long range strategic planning with budget development, Full budget disclosure – grants and other revenues, Understand what to look for on monthly expenditure and revenue reports

Superintendent Evaluation

Never before have students, teachers, administrators and school boards been held to such high standards of accountability. State and federal laws have dramatically ramped up the need for schools to focus on achieving high standards for all students. This workshop will address policies, practices, strategies, and systems that keep the school board focused on an effective and appropriate role for maintaining high performing learning environments.

Conducting Board Hearings

Learn mechanics and strategies for running effective school board hearings,

including student discipline, employee grievance, and dismissal hearings.

Budgeting PR

As your school budget nears completion and you begin to see the impact that fuel costs, health care, special education and other economic factors will have on 2007-08 school operations, it's time to prepare your budget passage strategies for the annual school district meeting.

Improving Board Operations

Strategies for getting the new board off to a good start following Town Meeting - includes board reorganization, board development activities, effective meeting management, streamlining the decision making process, and dealing with difficult behaviors

Board Member Swap Shop

Bring your own topics for discussion, receive feedback from experienced board members, and participate in interactive television dialogue that will help your leadership team grow. Here's your chance to pose questions and receive advice from school leaders who may have already "been there and done that!"

Governance Options and Enrollment Projections

Find out why and how other districts/supervisory unions are studying governance change options. Learn more about projecting future student enrollment trends. 🚗

To register for any of the VSBA workshops or to purchase a DVD please visit www.vtvsba.org or call 800-244-8722

VSBA will bill your supervisory union or school district upon request.

The following workshops are available on DVD from VSBA. Set back, relax, grab some popcorn and enjoy some school board professional development:

- ◆ Collective Bargaining
- ◆ School Board Member Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships
- ◆ The Role of the School Board Chairperson
- ◆ Developing the Budget
- ◆ Budgeting PR

To order call VSBA
800-244-8722

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Vermont School Boards Association

Personalities Affect Board Success

What can your favorite ice cream flavor or your preference in snack foods tell others about your personality and how it might affect the group dynamics of a school board? Plenty.

Debbie Manns, manager of board development for Texas Association of School Boards, described research on preferred styles of personal interaction and how these different "personality types," or interactive styles, bring different strengths and challenges to group activities.

The energetic Texan started the highly interactive session by asking attendees to complete a brief personal inventory to assess their personality type based on four sets of key characteristics, which correlate with behavior in a group.

Although most people have one or two dominant working styles that color their behavior, Manns focused on participants' predominate working styles. Once everyone identified his or her preferred working style, those who shared traits were grouped together at tables for further discussion.

Participants identified how their own style affects others and discussed how their tendencies can enhance and impede group success.

Manns used the acronym TEAM to describe four preferred styles of interaction, borrowing the first letter of each style:

- T stands for taskmasters. People who show a predominance of T characteristics tend to be aggressive, competitive, risk takers who are more goal-focused than people-focused. Ts are logical and politically astute and tend to see issues in terms of black and white rather than shades of gray. They like control and are often viewed as judgmental.

- E personalities are enthusiasts. Es tend to be spontaneous and flexible and influenced strongly by their emotions. They like freedom, tend to think out loud without censoring their thoughts, and are neither detail-oriented nor long-term-goal oriented. Es seek social approval and tend to base decisions on what others want. Generally optimistic, Es have a sense of humor and are often viewed as visionary.

- A-types are analysts who always seem to be asking for more data. As tend to be task oriented, concise, logical, punctual and organized. They strive to work for improvement and demand much of themselves and others. As value intelligence, are often good at math and science, prefer thinking to talking and are not comfortable talking about their feelings.

- Ms are the mainstays of the group. The key characteristics of Ms are that they are people-focused, care about others' points of view and are consensus builders. Ms tend to be flexible, tolerant and good listeners. They are empathetic and have a good insight into others. Generally not assertive, Ms like acceptance and inclusion and are viewed as sincere because they tend not to play "games" or engage in "politics."

*Excerpted from
Wisconsin School News
March 2007*

State Board of Education

For more information call Carol King at 802-828-5101 or carolking@education.state.vt.us.

- ◆ **March 20** - at the Noble Hall Lounge in the Vermont College, Montpelier

- ◆ **April 10** - at Champlain Valley UHS

- ◆ **May 15** - location TBD