

Finding Balance

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How can board members effectively balance their role as board members against their obligation to represent their constituents' interests, to protect school employees, fulfil their role as parents, represent concerned taxpayers, and be champions of public education? On a good day, any one of these can be exhausting, but when combined they can be overwhelming. It is no wonder that being a school board member is often called a thankless job, but that description is far from accurate. It is true that if a person is constantly looking for praise, or needs continuous reinforcement for doing the job they campaigned to do, then the "thankless job" description probably fits. However, most board members are content to do their work without recognition and any special acknowledgement for the work they do day in and day out on behalf of public education.

Still, it is easy for board members to become lost in issues or special circumstances that require board attention. If not careful, those concerns can quickly assume a life of their own, consuming enormous amounts of time, both in and out of the board room and often at the expense of board members' other obligations. A definitive list of preventative measures that guarantees board members

never get swept away in an avalanche of issues and concerns facing their local district simply does not exist, but there are a few tips for helping board members balance their private lives against their job as public officials.

Maintain perspective – your job is that of governance oversight. While you, together with your fellow board members, are accountable for the district, you are not responsible for day-to-day management decisions. The board is in a leadership position, not a management one.

You are part of a team – a board member does not operate in a vacuum. If the board has a difficult decision ahead of it, you have other members who will participate in determining the board's position. It is not all on you. Do your homework, rely on data-driven recommendations from your superintendent and exploit the experience of veteran members and administrators.

You are still a parent – You do not give up your parental rights or responsibilities when you become a board member. However, it is important that you distinguish your role as a parent from your role as a school board member. Wear these responsibility hats

individually and make sure you have the right hat on when you sit down to attend to the business of the district with your fellow board members.

Protect your private time – When you are out with your family, or enjoying private time at home, do not allow that time to be compromised by community members seeking to monopolize your time by using opportunities of convenience. This also includes any school extra-curricular events you attend.

Follow the chain-of-command – Enforce a line-of-authority process of problem resolution. Other constituents' issues are not yours, even if you are sympathetic to their cause. A board member has no authority outside of a publicly advertised meeting; consequently, the best advice you can give your constituents is to carry their concern through the proper channels to seek resolution. Never offer to champion constituents' issues or volunteer to resolve an issue on their behalf.

Striking a life balance between your role as a board member and the myriad of other responsibilities you have helps to ensure that you are mentally alert and ready to make decisions that represent the best interests of public education in your school community.

Parent Consent For Instruction on Human Sexuality

by Lisa F. Tanselle, ISBA General Counsel (ltanselle@isba-ind.org)

SEA 65, which goes into effect July 1, 2018, requires school administrators to take specific steps regarding informing parents (or students who are adults or emancipated minors) about the school's curriculum as it pertains to instruction on human sexuality. Specifically, school corporations must make instructional materials on human sexuality available to parents and must provide parents with a consent form that allows a parent to consent to or decline the instruction. Any student who does not participate in instruction on human sexuality must be given alternative academic instruction during the time that other students are receiving instruction on human sexuality.

Since many school corporations are preparing for registration activities for the 2018-19 school year, reviewing student

handbooks, and creating class schedules, school administrators may want to give some thought as to how best to implement the mandates of SEA 65, in particular creating and sending the consent form. The statute requires the consent form to "accurately summarize the contents and nature of the instruction on human sexuality that will be provided to the student." The consent form must also state that the parent has the right to review and inspect all materials related to the instruction of human sexuality. Lastly, the consent form must give the parent the opportunity to consent to or decline the instruction.

The new law requires the school to provide the parent with this consent form before the student receives any instruction on human sexuality. The form may be given to parents in any manner, including in an electronic

format. If the parent does not respond to the consent form within 21 calendar days, the school must send the consent form a second time to the parent. If the parent does not respond to the second form within 10 calendar days, the student may participate in the instruction. A parent may elect at any subsequent time to have his/her student opt out of the instruction.

While the law goes into effect on July 1, 2018, it may be prudent for school officials to consider implementing these provisions before then to ensure that school personnel know before the first day of school which students are participating in instruction on human sexuality and which students will be receiving alternative academic instruction.