

Patience: A Leadership Virtue

by Dr. Michael T. Adamson, ISBA Director of Board Services (madamson@isba-ind.org)

By this time, most board members have had a minimum of three meetings under their belts. Some are just getting a flavor of the intrinsic value to be realized by school board service, while others are wondering what they signed up for! Others have yet to decide whether the sacrifice to serve will be as fulfilling as they thought, or whether it will prove to be more invasive than they imagined. All of these thoughts pass through the consciousness of newly elected board members and only time will prove how their specific circumstances and board experiences will measure against their expectations.

What is true for all first-time members is that at this point you have yet to understand what you do not understand about the job of a board member. That is not an indictment, but it is a pretty fair observation. A board member's job is pretty diverse and there are few positions from which to compare a job

that carries high accountability without the means to directly affect the result. From a position of governance oversight, being accountable for the effect of public education without the ability to affect it directly can be most challenging. Yet, within the parameters of effective governance, a board can establish expectations that ensure excellence from and as a result of the educational opportunities in their local school district.

The most important leadership virtue in these crucial first few months for every new board member is patience. Curbing the desire or belief that somehow you need to know everything about everything will enable you to concentrate on those things that are crucial to know at the moment. Need-to-know information is vital in preparation for the next meeting and then for the next meeting after that and so on. Want-to-know information might be more

exciting and capture your interest more than what is currently on the board's plate, but it is not what is more important in this moment. By concentrating your attention on the next agenda, being as fully prepared as possible to be engaged in the decision-making process and then putting that preparation into action by participating to the best of your ability, you will quickly observe that the want-to-know information will flood in around the lists of must-do items your board must accomplish.

Patience is a virtue that can be most challenging to new members, but it is the one that will yield the greatest dividends. Effective school board service is not a sprint, but rather, it is more like a marathon in a never-ending race by members of previous generations to provide educational opportunities to the current one, building upon the collective knowledge of preceding efforts and combining it with present resource and opportunity. Run your race with patience; no one gets to the future ahead of anyone else. One day you will look behind and be amazed at how far you've run.

Recent Public Access Counselor Opinions

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

Understanding and abiding by the Open Door Law is critically important for school board members. Two opinions recently issued by the Public Access Counselor involved two different school boards in our state and are summarized below.

Formal Complaint No. 19-FC-13: The Public's Right To Attend School Board Meetings

Can a patron be banned from attending school board meetings? The Public Access Counselor suggests a patron may only be removed from a meeting if the patron's conduct is disruptive.

Facts

The school board president informed a patron that, as a result of a confrontation between the patron and the superintendent at a school-sponsored event, the patron was prohibited from being on school property for any reason. The patron filed a complaint with the Public Access Counselor, alleging that

the ban constituted a violation of the Open Door Law because she would not be able to attend school board meetings. In the meantime, the school board notified the patron that she would be permitted to attend school board meetings, even though its original letter failed to state this.

Opinion

The Public Access Counselor concluded that there was no violation of the Open Door Law since the school corporation clarified that the patron was able to be on school property for the purpose of attending public meetings of the school board, and opined that "the intersection of criminal trespass and the ODL [Open Door Law]-if any-is an issue for another day." However, the Counselor further noted that the right to observe and record public meetings is not absolute in that the school board reserves the right to maintain decorum and good order of a public meeting. Thus, patrons may not disrupt, interfere with, or otherwise obstruct the public business before the school board.

Formal Complaint No. 19-FC-4: Use of a Secret Ballot

Can a school board vote by secret ballot? The Public Access Counselor says casting votes in a way that does not allow the public to know an individual board member's vote is a violation of the Open Door Law.

Facts

A school board had five applicants interested in filling a vacancy on the school board. The board created a ballot that listed the names of the five applicants and a space for a write-in candidate. Each board member cast his/her vote on which applicant should fill the vacancy by marking the ballot. The ballots did not include the board members' signatures. The board president announced the name of the applicant who had received the most votes. A patron filed a complaint, alleging that the school board violated the Open Door Law by using the secret ballot.