

STARTING WITH A STRATEGY

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Beginnings are exciting to most people. It is always fun to start a new project. Most people can get enthusiastic about doing things on the front end. However, sustaining that effort throughout the entirety of a venture requires commitment and a plan with well-conceived milestones and objectives. If you don't plan for

what you wish to accomplish, then instead of being pro-active regarding major initiatives in public education, you run the risk of becoming reactive to current events and never progressing beyond the immediate decision horizon. You can't improve the educational

system from a vantage point that only sees today. You must strategically plan for an improved future.

Planning usually isn't required for routine, tactical matters. Effective board members typically make their day-to-day decisions by asking themselves, 'Is this good for my community's children?' However, the long-term, strategic goals of a school corporation require that board members reach a consensus about what to improve and how to play to their local region's strengths. These are the important decisions that will affect your school system for years to come. They require that board members stay focused on the children of tomorrow and keep key educational initiatives in their schools moving continuously forward to meet those students.

Admittedly, it can be tough. Several factors can distract a board member from having a concentrated focus on fostering school improvement. Financial woes and societal discord can affect board

harmony and the collective attention, but the election process is probably the biggest destabilizing influence. Whether one is directly elected or appointed by someone else who is, the turmoil of an election often makes an individual board member highly susceptible to losing sight of guiding positive change within public education. We work hard to earn the office and feel a sense of amazing relief when the whole ordeal is finished. Yet in spite of what your body may be telling you after reading your local election results, that deep sigh didn't signal the end of your race. It just marked the transition into the next phase of the school board member endurance course.

To succeed as a school board, the members must not only manage the business of the present, but they must look to the future and ensure that the infrastructure is in place to educate the children of tomorrow for whatever world that they will face. In addition to preparing some students for higher education, successful school oversight requires a deep, hard look into the economy of your local community and surrounding region. This is necessary so that graduating young people wanting to directly join the labor force can effectively demonstrate the skills needed to find satisfying employment.

Our job as public school board members is to see that our school systems provide basic knowledge, cultivate a life-long love of learning and citizenship, and teach the skills necessary for an individual to move successfully into the next stage of their lives.

No one can look into the future and predict the details of life with any reasonable accuracy. However, it doesn't take a crystal ball to see general trends and developments. Our future students will need enhanced general computer skills. They will have to be able to electronically search for all kinds of information, and it is vital that they learn how to ascertain the reliability of information from the web. To earn a comfortable living, future students will require information age skills that provide them with value in the coming labor marketplace. These wide-ranging principles should help guide your local school system planning for the future.

In Tippecanoe County, the boards of the Lafayette School Corporation, the Tippecanoe School Corporation, and the West Lafayette Community School Corporation collectively understood that our region of the state had a significant demand for technically-trained, career professionals that was likely to

grow significantly in the future. Upon detailed examination, it was quickly recognized that the resources of all three corporations would be required to provide a quality educational facility to meet the labor needs of our community. The superintendents of the corporations were empowered by their boards to proceed jointly, and the first classes in our new career and technical center began last year after several years of detailed curriculum planning and construction.

To succeed at creating and beginning effective educational projects, you have to believe in yourself and your own abilities. You have to keep in mind that you are working for the betterment of all children, now and in the future.

The Greater Lafayette Career Academy (CLCA) is a joint effort of the three local public school corporations in Tippecanoe County that provides preliminary professional skills training in the fields of construction, communication, teaching, health sciences, hospitality, IT, fire and safety, manufacturing, and logistics. Expansion efforts currently underway will include agricultural technology, welding, numerically controlled machining, and vehicular technology within the GLCA curricular offerings. Although the history of cooperation between our school corporations has been very strong, this joint effort would not have been possible without a shared vision for the future of our community. The research and analysis by each individual board led to a similar conclusion about the superiority of a larger,

combined career and technical center. The collective planning and execution proceeded fairly smoothly, because all three school boards were committed to the same vision.

The initiation of an activity is like constructing a building. There is a great deal of planning before any ground is ever broken and a lot of hard work afterward. To see any project through to completion requires perseverance and a collective commitment of purpose. As a school board member, you have the chance to create and sustain programs that mold young people's lives. The process isn't simple, but it isn't overwhelming either. Investigate. Analyze. Plan. Build. Evaluate and improve.

To succeed at creating and beginning effective educational projects, you have to believe in yourself and your own abilities. You have to keep in mind that you are working for the betterment of all children, now and in the future. Starting with a purpose ensures completion according to a plan. That's not a guarantee of success, but working without a plan certainly makes ultimate failure all the more likely. Dig-in and get started properly to finish successfully. The children of tomorrow are counting on it. 🏠