

SHOULDERING A BIG RESPONSIBILITY

A good school board can make a difference in the economic vitality, spirit and growth of a community and especially in the future of its young citizens.

Our forefathers believed that universal education was the key to the success of the nation and its citizens. They gave responsibility for public education to the states. Local communities provided for public schools through local school boards. The unique system worked well. It built the strongest nation in the world.

It is time to reaffirm the importance of strong, able school boards backed by their fellow citizens. It is crucial for those of you who care about your community, its children and the future to put your concerns into action – to serve on your school board and encourage other able leaders to join you. If you do not serve on the front line, you at least should vote good candidates into office and then support their efforts.

Like A Giant Corporation

The 1684 citizens serving on boards in 290 school corporations have the power that goes with running one of the largest businesses in the state. They govern the largest expenditures of public funds, run the largest transportation fleet, employ the largest number of people and maintain the most extensive facilities in the state. In short, school boards function as directors of large corporations, but with one extraordinary purpose: to produce educated young men and women as responsible citizens.

The board is responsible for hiring the superintendent and, with his/her help, for providing competent personnel for all phases of school operations. Salaries, budget and expenditures, personnel management and facility planning are all part of the board's assignment. The board oversees what should be taught and provides the resources while the professional staff determines how to do the teaching. Further, it makes sure schools are meeting state-prescribed requirements.

How Boards Make A Difference

Within these general responsibilities, school boards have the power to make a significant impact on the educational problems of today – and on the quality of education their young charges will receive. Boards, for example, can address the issue of illiteracy by mandating special attention in the primary grades for pupils with reading difficulties. They also can create programs to address dropout rates, problems of latchkey children, concerns about computer and technology literacy and a gamut of educational and social issues.

A Tough But Vital Job

Serving on a school board is a tough, time-consuming job. Education is an emotional issue and board members often find themselves at the center of controversy.

At the same time, few jobs have the power to bring so many benefits to a community. For pupils, a good education unlocks the intellect, opens doors to college, a satisfying and well-paying job and to responsible parenthood and citizenship. Schools touch almost all aspects of a

community, from property values to economic development potential. People want to live where schools are good and companies want to locate where there is a supply of educated workers.

A School Board Member

The effectiveness of a school board depends on the quality of its members. Ideal board members must be committed to serve all children. They must be open minded, visionary and informed, willing to listen and ready to learn. They must work as a team, build community support for education programs and withstand criticism. Above all, they must believe in public education and be dedicated to serving children and the community.

Indiana law further requires board members to be:

- a) registered to vote and consequently at least 18 years old. (No one who is at least 21 years old can be disqualified by local board age requirements.);
- b) registered to vote in the corporation he or she seeks to represent; and
- c) a resident of the school corporation at least one year before the election

There may also be additional local requirements. Information about additional local requirements can be obtained from the local superintendent of schools.

Becoming A Candidate

Candidates must file a petition of nomination with the clerk of the circuit court in the county with the greatest representation in the school corporation. Generally speaking, it must be signed by 10 registered voters residing in the school corporation. Pre-election and post-election financial statements also are required. Candidates should consult the clerk of their circuit court and election board for official forms, complete regulations and filing deadline information.

Information and assistance are available from your local school superintendent's office. Many candidates find it useful to attend school board meetings and confer with their superintendent to become familiar with issues before their schools.

The Indiana School Boards Association, a non-profit organization of all Indiana school corporation's boards of trustees, also provides valuable assistance to school board members. It sponsors seminars, conducts research, works with the Indiana General Assembly and generally promotes education.

To be an effective school board member and represent community views, candidates and board members need the continuing support of their fellow citizens because quality education incorporates many viewpoints – business, families, government, higher education, agriculture, social and religious institutions. All of these groups have needs for today, hopes for tomorrow and the knowledge and skills required for success.

An effective school board is essential for continued educational excellence for our boys and girls.

It is your responsibility.