

How the School Board REALLY works

The Mahomet-Seymour school board election is just a few weeks away which makes this a good time to discuss how the board operates and what their role is.

It is important to note that the role of the school board is not to be involved in all day to day operations at the schools. These duties fall on our administrators and teachers who are the ones who have been educated on how to deal with these issues and have the training and years of professional experience in education. The main role of the board is to deal with policy and set the course for long term future goals. Monthly board meetings consist of two main areas of business. The first is typical routine issues such as approving bills for payment, adopting annual resolutions, approving putting out bids, approving new course offerings, accepting donations etc.. . These issues typically do not require a lot of discussion. Board members receive this information days in advance and are able to do due diligence before the meetings and have questions answered by the relevant parties before the meeting starts. The December board meeting provided an excellent example of this. Our district works with other local districts to buy our diesel and gasoline as a group in order to secure better pricing. Trent Nuxoll, our Chief Business Officer, worked with vendors to secure the best price possible. Members of the Finance committee had discussions with Trent during the process. Once the bid was ready for a vote, a lot of time had already been spent doing due diligence in the weeks leading up to the board meeting. While it may seem that this was voted and approved rather quickly, behind the scenes a lot of work had taken place. This is exactly how an efficient board should operate. The board spends time doing work before the meeting gathering information and asking questions so that decisions are not made spur of the moment with no time to think and reflect on the issue. The idea that there is something wrong with these votes being unanimous fails to account for the fact that these issues are either very routine annual issues or issues that have already been thoroughly researched and worked on by our administrators in collaboration with the relevant board members that serve on the committees that handle that area.

The second thing the board handles is matters that the State of Illinois allows to be discussed in private. These include things like contract negotiations, student matters, safety and security procedures, personnel issues, property purchases and legal matters. These discussions are handled after the public has left the open session part of the meeting. The public doesn't see the board members spending multiple hours discussing only one or two issues in deep detail. An enormous amount of time, energy and effort goes into those discussions. Additionally, not every decision is unanimous in these meetings. There is disagreement, challenging of opinions and advocating for positions. Most importantly though, there is respect for every opinion in the room. Everyone is heard and encouraged to share their point of view. Through these discussions people change their minds. This is a direct result of the respect there is for one another and the realization that another person's opinion may be a better solution.

Another role of the school board is to listen to our community members. This communication is necessarily a two-way street. It has been voiced by some parts of our community that there is not enough board communication. This concern has been heard and efforts have been made to do better in that regard. Some ways the board has more actively engaged the community recently include curriculum nights, Bulldog Dialogue with Dr. Hall, articles in the Mahomet Citizen from Dr. Hall, live streaming and archiving board meetings and enhanced Skyward communication. We have also added a presence on Social media using Twitter and Facebook to communicate with the public and have added opportunities to open communication within the district through events like coffee and conversation. We would encourage any community member with ideas on how to further enhance meaningful communication to reach out to Dr. Hall or board members. Your feedback is very important. It is important to understand that the school board works as a body, no individual board member has the ability to act unilaterally. What they can do is listen to your feedback and direct you to the appropriate administrator that can take action or suggest a course forward. Since communication goes both ways, we would also

like to hear from you on what we are doing well, where we can improve and general feedback. As parents with children in the district we are just as committed as everyone in the community to seeing our district be the best it can be. Let's work together, by communicating together and being positive in all we do to give our children the best educational experience we can.

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