

Kieleidoscope

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Recently, I had the privilege of facilitating our first School Board Retreat of 2016. The purpose of the retreat was to welcome our newest members, Jill Priessner and Randall Bonde, to get to know one another better and to set board norms and operating principles. We began with an activity that highlighted each individual's approach to working on a team. Understanding each other's priorities when working in a group is one way of building mutual respect. The Board norms were developed collaboratively to enhance team productivity during board meetings. In addition, a consensus was reached on board functions and operating principles.

The National School Board Association lists eight characteristics of Effective School Board members and one of them reads: *Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.* Research shows this to be an important component to being a high-achieving district.

There was much discussion during the two and a half hour retreat and the overriding theme was the board's understanding and commitment to working with the community to develop student achievement as the top priority. Being a school board member is very time consuming. There is much to learn. A school board member must be grounded in their individual values and beliefs while advocating for public education. Members must listen to community member's feedback, analyze administrative recommendations and respect other board member's perspectives when making decisions. This is not a solo position. It requires a lot of time to keep up with the homework in preparation to do what is in the best interest of the school district.

Another one of the eight characteristics of effective school boards is: *to lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.* Through the candid discussion I surmised that each board member strongly believes this to be true. They also want to build collaboration and mutual respect with the community.

In the future, you will be hearing of a change in the school board meeting structure. The Board will hold community input sessions and there will be responses by board members at each work session. The purpose of this change is to better engage the citizens and the board in ongoing discussions to help resolve complex challenges facing the school district. Our board is keenly aware of the importance of community input and they have constructed a way to make it inviting and efficient.

There will still be times when decisions are not agreed on by all board members or decisions that are not agreed on by community members. Through having good collaborative dialogue and showing mutual respect this should be expected, accepted and supported so the district can continue to move forward.

Collaborative relationships and mutual respect require time and attention to nurture and maintain. I applaud our board for taking the time to focus on team development and for their commitment to continually work to improve our high-achieving school district.