

Some Notes Regarding School Boards

From interview with gentleman who was an Oregon school board member for over 20 years. He shared some tips/ideas...

School boards have two primary purposes: set policy and hire/fire the superintendent. They are also expected to do their homework (read policies and agenda items) and participate in the process.

Approaching a school board-

1. Call or write your school board members. They are elected and it is their job to listen to you. They may actually be quite surprised...as it is rather rare that individuals want to speak/meet with them.
2. Build credibility, let your face be known...show interest, curiosity in the process, desire to understand their purpose.
3. Never make the issue personal (don't attack them)...rather express your concern/opinion about the issue. Recognize that this is an unpaid position/public service. You as a tax payer have the right to communicate your ideas/concerns. Don't apologize for expressing your thoughts/ideas/emotions...just be sure to be respectful during the process.
4. Be ahead of the curve. School boards are always looking at/updating policy. Call the district office and ask them which policies are up for discussion/review. They most definitely will know this...have this schemed out months in advance. Ask for the agenda...either mailed to you or have them direct you to their website. Also...ask how you can view the policy being evaluated.
5. Once the policy is updated, it's too late to make an issue of it (the policy). Of course...if enough parents express concerns/get enough attention about an issue, I suppose it could be revisited. They have hundreds of pages of policy to deal with...addressing concerns in advance or during the process will be much better received.
6. *[**“Being ahead of the curve” is particularly important...as ODE/Brad Victor wants to change/update policy in school districts as...”this is the backbone of it all, once you get this in place...everything else falls together”]. The Oregon Administrative Rules have many vague and value-laden terms/concepts that should be challenged. I am seeing a lot of districts just “rubber stamp” these with little to*

no discussion. Because some parents/community members are not aware of the updated policy being proposed (they are busy living their lives) and because school boards are looking at huge amount of policies...unless someone (school board member, administrator, teacher, or community member) seeks clarification or pause...it gets locked in as the policy for years to come.]

7. Build a relationship with at least one school board member. If you have one that is supportive/shares your sentiments...this is huge. The more “homework” you can do for the school board member the better. Do 90% of the work and then give it to the school board members. They will really appreciate this.

Running for a position on the school board-

1. Don't let someone label/define you with an issue.
2. Understand that your job is not to run the schools...rather to set policy and hire/fire the superintendent.
3. Express why you want to run. For example, “I pay taxes, I want to be involved in the process, I want to have input, I have children in the district, etc. Anyone can run for school board...you are a taxpayer, I am a taxpayer.
4. Get some endorsements (ie: even from a current school board member ☺).
5. You got to have a catch; “a thing”...something that will retain name familiarity.
6. Get volunteers...go door-to-door.
7. Today...you can get precinct lists...and narrow your focus/strategize (ex: don't go to apartments, just homes...of those who actually vote).
8. Good to get in/run when 3 positions are up for vote. If you and other candidates are on the same page/share similar concerns...don't tie them together/create an association before the vote. Retain your autonomy...so public doesn't view it as a “take-over”. Then...the following year, one more school board member with similar concerns/values could get elected...and now you have a majority. Pretty easy to do this...but recognize that this can be done by those with values going other direction just as easily.

When you are on the school board-

1. Understand what your job is (and isn't)
2. Read the policy and agenda documents ahead of time
3. Listen first...talk last. Especially if advocates are promoting something you are opposed to. If possible...bring back to a policy already in place. Ask

them to define/defend a word/concept. Ask questions...much more effective than to just state your objections. Walk them through your concerns/educate/enlighten...let them answer the questions and begin to see the implications/your concerns.

4. Always try to find something positive to acknowledge...and then begin to express concerns, questions, points of clarification.
5. Look for those words/ideas within the policy that are vague or alarming.
6. Are the policies consistent with other current policies? Do they conflict, should they be added/deleted in any of them?
7. Take note of individuals in the audience that are attending the meetings...find out their concerns, meet for lunch maybe, listen.

***Regarding the Oregon Department of Education**

1. Districts have local control when it comes to policy making.
2. ODE will target the smaller districts because they are strapped for cash and manpower; free money, training, materials is tempting; there is also an element of intimidation via ODE that some will succumb to.
3. ODE cannot threaten to pull funds from the district if district doesn't accept their help/curriculum/OAR's.
4. In regards to curriculum, ask how many teachers actually use it and what percentage of it do they utilize. Consider the supplemental and links that are associated with the curriculum.
5. Expose/bring attention to curriculum (including links, supplemental materials, recommended services/agencies, programs, conferences students are encouraged to attend, true goals of youth advisory councils, etc.) that is being touted as "evidence based/medically accurate"; reference primary documents/evidence...and then ask ODE (district, superintendent, administration, or school board) LOTS of questions and expect them to justify their actions/recommendations/affiliations.