Being a School Board Member

The Board of Education is a policymaking body and members are the chief advisors to the superintendent on community attitude. Board members do not manage the day-to-day operations of a school district, but rather see to it that the system is managed well by professional administrators. To be a qualified candidate for the board, an individual must be:

- a U.S. Citizen
- at least 18 years old,
- a resident of the state for at least 30 days preceding the election (appointment),
- a resident of the school district for at least 30 days preceding the election (appointment),
- registered to vote in the school district for at least 30 days preceding the election.

There are conflicts of interest of which all board members must be aware so as not to jeopardize their reputation or that of the school district. Among the statutory prohibitions are:

- No member shall have, directly or indirectly, any pecuniary interest in any contract of the board or be employed for compensation by the board of which he or she is a member (Ohio Revised Code Section (RC) 3313.33).
- No member of a school board may knowingly authorize or employ the authority or influence of his or her office to secure authorization of any public contract in which he or she, a member of his or her family or any of his or her business associates have an interest (RC 2921.42).
- No board member may use or authorize the use of the authority or influence of his or her office to secure anything of value, or the promise of anything of value, to himself or herself, or solicit or accept anything of value that is of such a character as to manifest a substantial and improper influence upon him or her with respect to his or her duties (RC 102.03).

The above listing is neither all-inclusive nor does it list the many exceptions to these rules. If you think you may have a potential conflict of interest, please check with your district counsel, county prosecutor, city law director or the Ohio Ethics Commission at (614) 466-7090.

To be a good board member, the individual should offer the following:

- Knows that he or she can legally act as a board member only when the board of education is in session. No one person, unless authorized, should speak on behalf of the board.
- Avoids administrative decisions and does not attempt to second-guess the administration. The superintendent is the chief administrator of the school district and the board has no administrative function.
• Is well acquainted with school policies.
• Should vote at all times in the best interests of the children of the school district.
• Is flexible and realizes there are times when changes must be made, when tradition cannot be honored and when pressure must be ignored.
• Remembers that board business often requires confidentiality, especially in processes involving students, personnel, land acquisition, negotiations and security.
• Is interested in obtaining facts, but also remembers that the administration has responsibility for operating the schools, rather than spending all its time making reports to an individual board member.
• Is a good listener at board meetings, on the street corner, in the community or anywhere else approached, but never commits himself or herself, the board or the administration.
• Knows that the reputation of the entire school district is reflected in his or her behavior and attitude.
• Is able to support a decision when it is made.