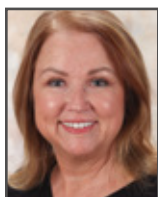


# TIPS

## SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS



**Mary Jo Rozmenoski** is president of the School District of Black River Falls Board of Education. She is WASB Region 6 director and 2nd vice president for the WASB.

**Gary Vose** is president of the Kettle Moraine School District School Board. He has served on the school board since 1987.



► **Is there something you wish you had known as a new board member?**

**Rozmenoski:** I wish I would have known more about the time commitment and importance of professional

development opportunities. Once I was elected and attended trainings on governance topics, I was hooked on wanting to learn more and continued to learn through informal and formal education. There are wide-open opportunities for school board members to be involved at all levels and I adjusted my work and personal life to include regular advancement and growth and continuous improvement at every level.

**Vose:** As a new school board member, I found myself trying to get immersed in all of the details and questioning areas that were of little importance. Instead, looking back, I wish I would have spent more time speaking to administrators and teachers to learn what was really important to them, how the board could better support the students and staff, and understanding the long-term vision and needs of the district. I have found it helpful to always tell myself, 'students first.' I also believe it is important for new

board members to better understand the impact the state Legislature has on education and spend time developing a good relationship and being able to influence them.

► **What can a school board member do to increase student achievement?**

**Rozmenoski:** Our school board is committed to student success and the goal that all students will increase their achievement and attain annual personal growth goals in order to reach their highest potential. While there are many factors impacting student achievement that we as a school board cannot control, we positively impact student outcomes by our governance practices including:

- Engaging in formal and informal board development and training;
- Governing effectively in partnership with our superintendent;
- Being open, honest and

# Tips for **NEW** SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Veteran school board members, administrators and business managers discuss school leadership

**LAST MONTH**, hundreds of new school board members joined school boards across the state.

The WASB welcomes our new members and thanks them for taking on the important duty of serving on their local school board.

The WASB posed questions to experienced school board members, district administrators and business managers and asked them their take on school board governance.

We hope this insight is helpful for new and experienced school board members alike.

*Thank you for your service.*

respecting each other and appreciating each other's strengths;

- Proactively engaging with our community; and
- Understanding and committing to our strategic plan.

**Vose:** First of all, understand what really does influence the increase of student achievement (*e.g.*, how to motivate individual students, how to motivate staff to motivate individual students and how to engage parents in the process). After really understanding these factors, speak to staff to get their input and buy-in to practical ways of defining, developing and implementing processes and programs designed to individualize the

learning for students based on their needs and interests in order to maximize their overall achievement. Board members need to champion and support the changes identified and do so in a way that encourages creativity and ownership of the learning without becoming overly critical of current practices — it is called leadership not dictatorship.

► **What are some of the bigger issues or challenges that you face as a school board member?**

**Rozmenoski:** The most challenging times are times of change and I feel that public education has become a divided political issue at many levels.

I look at change from a positive perspective. It is constant and is an opportunity to take the best of the past and move forward. In our work as locally elected officials responsible for balancing budgets, we face difficult choices in a challenging fiscal environment. There is great concern over the dollar cuts to public education and we are charged with keeping the high standard and responsibility to fund public education at levels sufficient to ensure all students an equal opportunity to learn. Our budgets are stretched to the limit and we must continue to keep a strong public education system as part of Wisconsin heritage by bringing innovative instruction to

Looking back, I wish I would have spent more time speaking to administrators and teachers to learn what was really important to them and how the board could better support the students and staff. — Gary Vose



our students. Difficult decisions affecting people’s lives are sometimes necessary.

**Vose:** Change within school districts is slower than within the private sector — a board member needs patience and a focus on the longer term rather than what you, as an individual, would like to see happen tomorrow. Another major challenge can be other board members, individual board members with an agenda. This can be a tremendous diversion of time and effort of district staff, which in turn can slow down the rate of change even more. Yet another major challenge is political – the unwillingness of our Legis-

lature to ‘fix’ the state funding formula, which is inherently inequitable yet our politicians seem to believe it is in their best interests not to tackle this important issue.

► **What have you learned from your time serving on the school board?**

**Rozmenoski:** I have learned that we can make a difference and we are not in this alone. Community engagement and collaborative relationships are the key to excellence. Staff, families, students and the community need to be effectively engaged in problem solving and decision making to promote shared leadership in the educational process and feel connected and proud to be a part of the school district.

**Vose:** Education is very dynamic and the rate of change is ever increasing. You can’t fall into the trap of

believing ‘I received a good education, so why change.’ Instead, you need to be forward looking and continuously be identifying better ways of improving the whole education process. Board members also need to be leaders with passion and most of all be able to identify, attract and hire the very best talent, especially the superintendent. You need to be willing to support the ongoing development of staff (not just taking more college-level courses) and understand some basic principles of motivation – I personally really like the Daniel Pink model, which emphasizes autonomy, mastery and purpose as described in his book, “Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us,” or for those of you who would like the Cliff Notes version, search online for the video, “Daniel Pink: The puzzle of motivation.” □

## Walworth School Board Member Wraps Up 48 Years of Service

**Kelly Freeman**, former president of the Walworth Joint #1 Board of Education, finished her final term as a school board member in April. She was first elected to the school board in 1968. She had attended school in the district and had young daughters in the district when she was first elected.

“It seemed it was the opportune time to try to give back, in some small way, the love of learning the teachers and the district had provided to me and perhaps I could help do the same for our students,” Freeman said.

Freeman said one of the most gratifying parts of serving on the school board was the learning experience and working with her fellow board members.



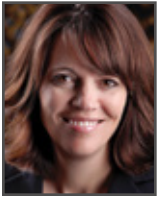
“Over the years as board members changed I was always amazed. Even though we had never worked together before, we sat at the table and were able to accomplish the board’s business respectfully always with one goal in mind — what is best for our students.”

As to why she stayed on the school board for all these years, Freeman said because she loved it.

“I have the utmost respect for our faculty and staff and for our citizens who support our school year after year — all with the same desire to provide a safe learning environment for our students,” she said. “I mean this sincerely when I say it has been an honor and a privilege to serve our Walworth Jt. #1 School District.” □



## DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS



**Kristine Gilmore** is superintendent of the D.C. Everest School District. She was named the 2012 Superintendent of the Year

by the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators.

**Deb Kerr** is superintendent of the Brown Deer School District. She is president of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators.



► **From your perspective as district administrator, what should school board members be cognizant of as they begin their service?**

**Gilmore:** As a new board member it is essential to listen, read, and ask questions as you begin your new role. School districts are complex systems with a lot of moving parts. If board members keep committed to students and the mission of the district, it will be easier to make good decisions. It is important to remember that a board only makes decisions as a whole and not individually. Together, you will set policies and the direction of the district. The

heavy lifting is done by the district administrator and staff.

**Kerr:** First of all, congratulations on making a commitment to serve the children and families in your community. Getting a great education is essential for all students in your district to become world-class ready for any career or college pathway they pursue. Additionally, be ready to work as a collaborative team with members of the board, the administration, and school community. Have a positive attitude about your work and don't be afraid to ask questions or share ideas. Try to be visible at school and community events as you are an ambassador of education.

► **How can new school board members establish good working relationships with their district administrators?**

**Gilmore:** A relationship is a two-way street and to make it positive, both members need to put energy into it. Take time to get to know each other. Some questions for a district administrator: What is your leadership style? How do you best communicate? What are your core values? What keeps you up at night? What about our district makes you most proud? Where do we have room to grow as a district? Knowing the answers to these types of questions may help you better understand your district administrator.

**Kerr:** Making time to get to know

each other is very critical to a successful working relationship with board members and district administration. Just like you would expect your child's teacher to get to know their students, this is the expectation for new board members and your district administrator. Come early to meetings to say hello and if you have any questions about school matters, try to call ahead of time as sometimes answers require doing some research about particular issues. Attend any orientations for new board members or meetings arranged by your school board. Visit the schools and invite the district administrator to share school district points of pride, what they are currently working on, and how you as a board member can support our staff doing this important work.

► **As a whole, what qualities does a good school board have?**

**Gilmore:** A good school board keeps committed to the district mission without letting individual members' thoughts, ideas, or agendas get in the way. They keep the focus on what is best for the district and support the administration and staff in their work to achieve student success. Over my past 13 years as superintendent, I have seen very successful boards work collaboratively, respect each other's differences and keep a sense of humor.

**Kerr:** 1) An unwavering commitment to student learning and excellent



It is important to remember that a board only makes decisions as a whole and not individually. Together, you will set policies and the direction of the district. — *Kristine Gilmore*

# TIPS

teaching for ALL children. 2) Acknowledgment of all of the goodness in education but can also have those difficult conversations about closing the achievement gap for ALL children. 3) Serves as an advocate for public education and for the community. 4) Willingness to be life-long learners and continue to learn and grow as a board. 5) Celebrates the wonderful accomplishments of students and staff all throughout the school year. □

## SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS



**Bob Avery** is the director of business services for the Baraboo School District and president of the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials.

**Keith Lucius** is the assistant superintendent, business director for the Ashwaubenon School District. He was named the 2013 School Business Manager of the Year by the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials.



► **From your perspective as business manager, what do you think school board members should be cognizant of as they begin their service?**

**Avery:** There are three things that stand out as absolutely fundamental for new school board members to be aware of: 1) that most financial information is recorded in the general operations budget - Fund 10; 2) that approximately 85-95 percent

The opportunities for increasing revenue to offset rising costs are quite limited, so managing the budget really is about managing expenditures. — *Bob Avery*

of the revenues for the general operations budget of any given school district is governed by the state revenue limit statutes; and 3) that, in general, approximately 67-75 percent of the district's costs in the general operations budget are personnel related.

**Lucius:** Review board meeting materials before the meeting and whenever possible ask questions before the meeting. When this is done, administrators can have the answer at the meeting. This allows the entire board and the public to have the information at the meeting before the board takes action.

► **What school finance issues are important for new school board members to understand or study?**

**Avery:** The opportunities for increasing revenue to offset rising costs are quite limited, so managing the budget really is about managing expenditures. Secondly, board

members should understand the relationship between state aid and local property taxes within the revenue limit formula and where one's district stands in the formula. Finally, that the mill rate has little to no bearing on what property taxpayers see on their tax bills each year and is therefore less important than it is perceived to be.

**Lucius:** For new board members, I feel that they need to have a basic understanding of the revenue limit formula and the equalization aid formula. They don't need to know the details, but understand the concept of how they work. For example, how is the budget impact different if the district has a new resident student versus a new open enrollment student? Or how will a referendum impact aid? A board member does not need to be able to calculate the impact — I will do that for them. But they may need to explain the impact to a taxpayer. ■



Do **YOU** know who your EAP provider is?  
**OUR clients DO.**

# 74%

of employees in **OUR** program say they'd **MISS US** if we were gone!

**OUR BEST IS HARD TO FORGET.**

Call **today** to find out why!

**REALiving**  
Helping You Be Your **BEST.**

855.233.1048  
www.REALiving.com

