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Guest Editorial [Column]
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School Board: not for the faint of heart

Did you enjoy your school curriculum when you were a student? Were you a fan of the length of your school day? Was your school overcrowded? Do you know who was responsible for these school decisions: what subjects would be taught, length of school day, whether or not to build another school? ***Your School Board, that's who.***

School boards link communities and their public schools. They are specially positioned to build public consensus to improve student outcomes, share needs of students with communities, direct resources for improving student condition, set goals and vision for student achievement.

Parents are devoted advocates of their children and often have strong opinions on their education. They can be demanding, dedicated, and powerful proponents for their children. School Board Directors have to learn to navigate rocky territory lined with employee needs, parental confusion and concerns, and legal requirements, to do the best job they can in ensuring their students receive an excellent education.

According to the Washington State School Director's Association (WSSDA), under Washington state law, school boards have broad discretionary powers to adopt policies that promote the education and physical activity of kindergarten through 12th grade students. School boards are formed under Title 28A RCW.

School Board Directors are elected to nonpartisan 4 year terms and together form the governing body of a school district. They act as agents of the state and per RCW 28A.320.015, the powers of school board directors include:

- broad discretionary power to determine and adopt written policies for the development and implementation of programs, activities, services, and practices to promote education &

daily physical activity of K-12 students; promote effective safe management and operation of the school district,

- responsibility for governance functions delegated by the Legislature. They also have implied duties to carry out what the Legislature authorizes, and which improves public school programs or improves the administration of school districts.
- hires, evaluates, and oversees school district superintendent.

As with other municipal governments, school boards must comply with open public meetings act (RCW 42.30).

How are school districts funded?

Under Article IX of the Washington State Constitution, responsibility for funding public schools rests with our state legislature. It allocates funding and disburses it through the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). For those living in a cave for the past half dozen years, the sad truth is that the Legislature has failed to fully fund public schools.

In 2007, two families sued the state over inadequate school funding. One of these families was named McCleary. In 2012, the Washington Supreme Court ordered the state Legislature to find a funding solution under its unanimous McCleary Decision. In 2014, the State Supreme Court found the Legislature in contempt for failing to establish a funding plan and fined the Legislature \$100,000 daily starting in 2015. These sanctions continued until June 2018, with the collected monies going towards education.

Basically, McCleary said that relying on local levies or federal funding was unstable and unfair and therefore, unconstitutional. Before McCleary, funds are raised primarily through property taxes and local levies collected by the state and redistributed to the various school districts.

In 2017, the governor and Legislature approved a complex property tax plan that raises the statewide tax and phases in limits on future tax revenues collected by school districts through local levies. In November 2018, the Court ruled that Washington had not fully satisfied conditions of the McCleary decision so lawmakers added an additional \$776 million to school funding pot statewide.

A Good School Board:

1. Sets a vision for quality education in the school district
2. Advances policies that transform the vision into guidelines
3. Displays accountability and transparency
4. Leads in the community by listening to students and community concerns
5. Forges community consensus

Your vote matters

Your vote for school board director will help shape the school's curriculum, new school design & construction, repair of existing facilities, staffing levels, and more, for years to come.

Due to typical low turnout for these elections, your vote for school board director will count more than almost any other election. Be an informed voter. Learn about the director candidates and their goals in serving on your school board. Make an informed decision in November.

Not registered? Go to VoteWA.org to register online.

Vote. It matters.