

"Federation Corner" column
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Educating the Board of Education is hard work!

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The Civic Federation Education Committee needs your help. Like many members of the Community, we have been trying to educate the Board of Education (BoE). Before proceeding with this column, I need to define some new acronyms. At a recent public hearing, it was suggested to all of the people who were testifying that we should be careful not to use the term BoE when we were in fact referring to a majority of the BoE, or some of the BoE, or one member of the BoE. Searching for a suitable acronym that can be used for all such references, I have decided to use BM (Board Member, Board Majority) and to indicate, by context, how the acronym is to be understood.

We have found that some BMs are especially difficult to educate. This is not uncommon in the arena of adult education, especially when the adults in question are quite knowledgeable and successful. Educators often speak of the need to assist students in the acquisition of Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KSA); some prefer the term Perspectives (KSP), but I am old-school and am comfortable with KSA. We are ALL adult learners (we teach one another by communicating with one another) and we all have a goodly level of Knowledge and Skills. In most cases the challenge, to those who are professionals in adult education, is more in the area of ATTITUDE. Such is the case with respect to many BMs.

We (and others) have been working very hard to educate several BMs. We appear to have been rather unsuccessful. At the last BoE meeting (May 9) I offered Public Comment, based on analogy, as to why BMs should consider the wisdom of accepting the advice of many in the Community even if they (BMs) did not agree. This was in the context of the ongoing debate over the fate of the Seven Locks ES, but has much broader relevance; the testimony is available in text form on the MCCF website. After 14 citizens had offered Public Comment, one BM asked me a question, related to my comment. Most educators are delighted when a student asks a serious question because that is frequently a sign that a channel of communication has been established. Unfortunately, from the nature of the question and the fact that the BM cut me off before hearing my answer, it was obvious to me that I had once again been unsuccessful. Like most educators I regard the failure of any of my students as - at least in part - my failure as well. [If you are interested, contact me by Email (available on our website) and I will provide you with access to a video-clip of the entire Public Comments portion of that BoE meeting.]

We will continue in our efforts to educate this BM and others. But it is hard work. Often a student only understands an extremely simple lesson when it is presented by numerous teachers, each delivering the same message in a slightly different manner. So we need your help. We need you to attend BoE meetings and observe the behavior of BMs. Decide whether you agree with us that their attitudes are not ones we want our children to learn. Perhaps offer Public Comment of your own. Perhaps write a letter to the BoE.

You may be wondering why you should spend your time on this. Suppose you believe that MCPS is doing a very good job: are you sure that the 50% of your tax dollar that is going to MCPS is being used as efficiently as it can be? Suppose that YOUR child has received a very good public education: are you sure that other children have received the same high quality education? Suppose that your child has NOT been treated equitably: do you think that MCPS will change its policies unless several BMs change their attitude and help provide the guidance - to the current Superintendent - that so many in the Community feel is lacking? Our Committee is convinced that MCPS is doing some things well, but can and must improve. We need to educate some BMs. We are all in this together. We need your help.