

AGENDA


We Believe In Public Education

One Thousand Leaders Attend “Governing 21st Century Schools”

It's a record breaker! It is estimated that more than 1,000 school board members, superintendents and other educational leaders attended the 1999 GSBA/GSSA Annual Conference and/or the pre-conference training activities held two days prior to the conference. The conference and pre-conference training activities took place in Atlanta, December 1-4. Pre-conference training opportunities included the GSBA E. Freeman Leverett School Law Seminar and the GSBA New Board Member Orientation.

The 1999 GSBA/GSSA Annual Conference, “Governing 21st Century Schools,” provided new perspective to educators getting ready for the year 2000. Here's a wrap-up of what speakers had to say about accountability, student achievement and public education in general during the conference.

Governor Roy Barnes

Governor Barnes called upon school board members and superintendents to make the hard decisions now that will have lasting effects on improving our educational system. He said that we have to focus on improving the quality of instruction and that all efforts should be focused in



From left, GSBA Executive Vice President Gary Ashley, Governor Roy Barnes and GSBA President Y.N. Myers, Jr.



Bob Hughes enlightened conferees on many aspects of technology and education.

that direction. Governor Barnes believes that Georgia has made significant progress in “non-instructional” areas such as facilities, amount of the state's budget going to education, etc. But he said the time has come to change and improve the quality of instruction and examine accountability surrounding the results achieved. Here are some additional items needing attention according to the Governor:

- Reducing regulations at all levels.
- A system of objective testing and accountability.
- Reducing class sizes, especially in grades K-3.
- Addressing critical shortage areas in teaching positions such as special education, math and science.
- Shifting some administrative costs from the state to the local level.
- Providing additional funding for M&O and reduce the lag in funding for training and experience.

Bob Hughes

Education Technology Exchange President Bob Hughes provided conference participants a glimpse of
Continued on page eight...



Special Interest Clinics like this one presented by BellSouth offer excellent learning opportunities.

The Newsletter of
the Georgia School
Boards Association.

December 1999

Volume 5

Number 3

Contents

- “GSBA Functions are a Product of Talent, Hard Work and a Lot of Planning” by Gary Ashley – page 2
- “GSBA Provides the Classroom, We Provide the Students” by Y.N. Myers, Jr. – page 2
- Executive Session by Harben and Hartley— page 3
- Georgia Power Named Georgia Friend of Education— page 6
- GSBA Staff – page 6
- GSBA Planner— page 6
- GSBA Associate Members – page 8
- “Dealing With Difficult People” – page 10
- “Standards for Local Boards of Education” – page 11

From the Executive Vice President...

GSBA Functions are a Product of Talent, Hard Work and a Lot of Planning

By Gary Ashley



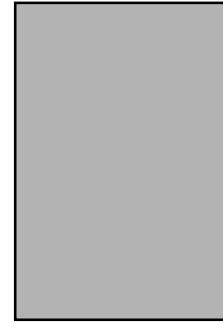
Gary Ashley
GSBA Executive Vice President

I have been serving GSBA for more than 20 years and in all of that time I have tried not to brag too much on our staff. Not because we're not deserving, but because we are a service organization and it is our job to provide the highest quality products and services for our members. I'm going to depart from the norm because I think GSBA has set a new standard in Georgia for professional development activities and conferences.

While this year's annual conference broke attendance records, GSBA also has made leaps in improving the overall structure and appearance of the meeting. Many people have heard me say that this kind of planning and organization doesn't happen overnight. It takes a year's worth of planning and implementation to put together a meeting like we had in Atlanta on December 3-4. Not to mention the planning that goes into the preconference training activities— which also takes a lot of pre-planning.

A lot of conference attendees are surprised to learn that there aren't at least 100 GSBA staff members to pull off a conference like the one just held. In fact, they are VERY surprised to learn that we can accomplish what we do with a staff of 19. I'm proud of the team we've brought together. They are talented professionals who are interested in making GSBA the best it can be and they do an excellent job.

GSBA is known for its organization and high standards for excellence. Our staff is behind it all working to make each and every function operate smoothly so that our attendees leave feeling professionally satisfied. ❧



Y.N. Myers, Jr.
GSBA President

I've been serving in education for a long time, as an educator (retired now) and as a board member. And there is no question about the fact that GSBA makes it easier for all of us in education— regardless of the role we play— to be better informed about the issues before us.

From GSBA's President...

GSBA Provides the Classroom, We Provide the Students

By Y.N. Myers, Jr.

The recent annual conference is just the latest example of the kinds of activities GSBA provides its members and others so that those involved in the institution of public education can make better decisions. These functions serve as our "classrooms" so that we can continue learning about education issues, new laws and about what other school districts

are doing to better serve their students. These functions also provide us the opportunity to get to know one another.

I commend GSBA for providing me and the other 1,054 school board members in Georgia with these opportunities. Hopefully, every person who attended this year's conference went back home and told at least 10 people about all that they learned at the conference— about the Governor's own statements on his Education Reform Commission, technology in the schools, how to be a better leader in the next millennium and how to better handle ourselves and others in challenging situations.

If you missed this year's conference, please read over this issue of *Agenda* so that you, too, can have some of the benefit of what GSBA put together for all of us. Governing 21st century schools will be an awesome task, but with help from GSBA we'll be better prepared. ❧



GSBA Staffers Karen Hodges and Debbie Tweedell (left to right) assist conference attendees at the Registration Desk.

❧
"A lot of conference attendees are surprised to learn that there aren't at least 100 GSBA staff members to pull off a conference like the one just held. In fact, they are VERY surprised to learn that we can accomplish what we do with a staff of 19."

—Gary Ashley

Executive Session: Legal Issues for Board Members

By Harben & Hartley
GSBA General Counsel

GEORGIA SCHOOL LAW: A Guide for School Board Members and Administrators

Many school board members have told us that the 1999 E. Freeman Leveret School Law Seminar was the most successful they had attended. We know there were more board members, superintendents and local attorneys attending than any previous seminar. The subjects covered during the seminar certainly were timely and relevant to the issues school boards are struggling with this year.

One question we heard from several of the attendees had to do with GSBA's announcement of the school law book we are writing and GSBA is publishing for distribution during the Spring of 2000 after the General Assembly has completed its upcoming session: Georgia School Law: A Guide for School Board Members and Administrators. School board members and superintendents wanted to know what will be included in the book and how will it be organized. Most of all, we heard questions as to whether the book will be written in such a manner that would make it truly useful to members of local school boards, as well as school administrators and board attorneys. We decided this column would give us an opportunity to respond more fully to those questions.

As veteran school board members know, GSBA has published for many years the Legal Reference Manual which was updated annually. The Legal Reference Manual was the crowning achievement of the late Freeman Leverett, our predecessor as general counsel to GSBA, and a true friend to those of us who practice school law. The Legal Reference Manual is organized according to the policy numbering system created by NSBA many years ago. It consists of an analysis of school law as it has evolved over the past several years and an extensive discussion of cases from the Supreme Court, the Eleventh Circuit Courts of Appeal, decisions of Georgia's appellate courts, as well as other state courts and administrative bodies. The Manual has been quite useful to those lawyers who devote most of their time to school law, as it was a virtual legal encyclopedia or discourse of school law.

However, many school board members, administrators and attorneys who did not find it possible to keep

up with the almost daily changes in school law have asked GSBA for some time that it consider publishing a school law book organized in a different manner, presenting the information that they must have, but written in clear, understandable language devoid of "legalese." Such a book should include appropriate references to the sources of the law to enable the reader to do more extensive research, if necessary, but the text should be written in such a manner that those who do not have legal training can understand what the law is in particular situations. Board members and school personnel, we have been told, need a book in which they can find answers to the kind of questions which come up routinely, especially during board meetings or when quick decisions need to be made.

We were given the assignment to cull from the Legal Reference Manual, the Georgia Code, decisions of federal and state courts, applicable regulations, State Board of Education rules and decisions of cases decided by it on appeal, as well as the many other sources of the law we refer to as "school law," concise

Continued on page five...

"We plan to outline that body of school law which is of particular relevance to the daily operation of a local school system as answers to specific questions; we believe this method of presentation will enable the reader to find information much quicker than any other format would allow."

Harben & Hartley
GSBA General Counsel

*Building on a Tradition
Since 1927*

From Concept to Completion

- Preconstruction
- Bidding
- Construction
- Post Construction

M. B. Kahn is the 7th largest builder of educational facilities in the nation. Let our professional team build your next facility.



M. B. KAHN CONSTRUCTION CO., INC.
CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT DIVISION
1270 WINCHESTER PKWY., SUITE 202
SMYRNA, GA 30080
(770) 435-9700 \ FAX (770) 435-9799

The Laidlaw Solution Works.

Put Laidlaw to Work for Your District.

Call 1-800-LAIDLAW for your free copy of “The Laidlaw Solution” and a comprehensive cost analysis designed to keep your district moving ahead.

Laidlaw

We Carry the Nation’s Future

CHILDREN’S MIRACLE NETWORK LOGO

Executive Session, continued from page three...

answers (when there are answers) to the many legal questions which arise daily in local school districts.

To say the very least, this task is challenging. The laws applicable to school districts are extensive and often complex. Our courts each year decide dozens of important cases which in some manner affect how our schools are governed or operated. GSBA publishes a number of useful monographs and papers dealing with certain aspects of school law, but outside of the Legal Reference Manual, there is not one source of information on school law which attempts to be both comprehensible and comprehensible.

We plan for the book to be organized by subject matter in a number of chapters ranging from how board members are elected, the various powers and authority of local school boards, how board meetings are conducted to chapters outlining the rights and responsibilities of teachers, students and parents. The book will treat not only how local school boards control and manage the school district, but also the day to day administration of the various schools in the district. This would include the legal issues in hiring and supervising personnel, the non-renewal or discharge of personnel and the admission, and discipline, safety and instructional issues in educating students. Construction issues, finance questions, transportation problems and the business operations of local school districts will be included as well as many other topics of concern to board members and administrators.

The book will be presented in a question and answer format. Most of our days are spent in responding to questions from the local school districts we represent and we hope to cover most of the questions which arise routinely. We plan to outline that body of school law which is of particular relevance to the daily operation of a local school system as answers to specific questions; we believe this method of presentation will enable the reader to find information much quicker than any other format would allow.

The 2000 session of the General Assembly likely will provide us with new material for the book. We hope the Supreme Court and the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals will decide several important cases currently pending before the time the book must be published. We will update the book each year in order to keep the book current and useful. Following each session of the legislature, GSBA will publish a supplement to fit in a pocket in the back cover of the book; when the supplement is too large to fit easily in the pocket, a new edition of the book will be prepared.

We hope board members, administrators and board attorneys will suggest material for the book. It is our intention that this book will be useful to everyone associated with public schools in our state who need to know school law. ↔

To order *Georgia School Law: A Guide for School Board Members and Administrators* fill out this form and send it to GSBA.

Name

Title

School System/Organization

Shipping Information:

Street

City/State/Zip

Phone Number

FAX Number

E-Mail Address


Indicate the quantity you are ordering: ____

Pricing Information:
Advance Orders: \$125 + shipping
Upon Publication:
\$175 + shipping

I understand that I will be billed for my order once the publication is shipped. The Guide is scheduled to be published by Spring 2000, after the completion of the General Assembly.


Signature: _____


Complete order form before March 2000, detach and send to:
GSBA
5120 Sugarloaf Parkway
Lawrenceville, GA 30043
FAX (770) 962-5392



**SPECIAL
Pre-Publication
Offer**

Georgia School Law
GEORGIA SCHOOL LAW
A GUIDE FOR
SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND ADMINISTRATORS





AUTHORS:
SAM S. HARBEN, JR.
PHILLIP L. HARTLEY

PUBLISHED BY:
THE GEORGIA SCHOOL
BOARDS ASSOCIATION

Scheduled for publication in the Spring of 2000, this guide will provide a comprehensive resource for school board members, administrators, educators and attorneys to the law which govern our public schools in Georgia. The book will be organized by topics with a question and answer format which will explain in lay terms the essential laws which every school board member and school administrator must know in order to govern our public schools. There also will be available a yearly update service to keep your guide up-to-date.

Order your copy today and save! Use the order form at right, or order online at www.ggba.com. Send no payment now. Orders will be billed upon shipment of merchandise.

GSBA Staff

- **Gary Ashley**, Executive Vice President - gashley@gsba.com
- **Gil Parrish**, Deputy Executive Director - gparrish@gsba.com
- **Lyle Andersen**, Risk Control Manager - landersen@gsba.com
- **Nancy Bailey**, Staff Assistant - nbailey@gsba.com
- **Lee Gaby**, Director of Finance and Risk Management - lgaby@gsba.com
- **Tearese Grayson**, Information Systems Specialist - tgrayson@gsba.com
- **Pam Harrison**, Staff Assistant - pharrison@gsba.com
- **Karen Hodges**, Staff Assistant - khodges@gsba.com
- **Elaine Horne**, Risk Services Manager - ehorne@gsba.com
- **Billy Johnson**, Professional Development Specialist - bjohnson@gsba.com
- **Laura Reilly**, Communications Specialist - lreilly@mindspring.com
- **Dr. Don Rooks**, Legislative and Policy Specialist - drooks@gsba.com
- **Jeanette Shelnett**, Administrative Assistant - shelnett@gsba.com
- **John Shore**, Risk Analyst Manager - jshore@gsba.com
- **Catrina Tillis**, Front Office Assistant - ctillis@gsba.com
- **Debbie Tweedell**, Bookkeeper - tweedell@gsba.com
- **Sandy Vanags**, Policy Coordinator - svanags@gsba.com
- **Mark Willis**, Controller - mwillis@gsba.com
- **Millie Rodriguez-Wys**, Staff Assistant - mwys@gsba.com

Ga. Power Award photo

Georgia Power Company President and Chief Executive Officer David Ratcliffe accepts the Georgia Friend of Education Award from GSBA Executive Vice President Gary Ashley.

Georgia Power Named Georgia Friend of Education

Many school systems in Georgia have benefited in some way from Georgia Power Company's commitment to public education. From special consultants trained to assist school districts in conserving energy to mentoring programs in the schools, Georgia Power is a model corporate citizen—especially when it comes to public education.

Because of the lengths Georgia Power Company has gone to support public education in general and GSBA with specific projects, the company was named a Georgia Friend of Education. "Normally this award is given to an individual," said GSBA Executive Vice President Gary Ashley, "but Georgia Power has shown itself to be an exemplary advocate of quality public education. And their support of Leadership GSBA and other GSBA initiatives has greatly enhanced our Association's ability to provide the highest quality professional development opportunities for school board members."

Georgia Power Company President and Chief Executive Officer David Ratcliffe accepted the award on behalf of the company at the 1999 GSBA/GSSA Annual Conference in early December.

For a complete listing of GSBA's 1999 award recipients, visit the Association's web site at www.gsba.com. ☎

☎ GSBA PLANNER ☎

January 2000

- 3-7 Georgia School Board Member Appreciation Week
- 10 NSBA So. Ex. Directors Meeting
New Orleans, Louisiana
- 17 Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday
- 19 Leadership GSBA
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Macon
- 24-26 Communities in Schools State Conference
Omni Hotel, Atlanta
- 27 NSBA Executive Directors' Winter Institute
Washington, DC
- 28-30 NSBA Leadership Conference
Washington, DC
- 30-Feb.1 NSBA Fed. Relations Network Conference
Washington, DC

February 2000

- 8 GSBA Board of Directors and Governmental Operations Committee
"Day at the Capitol"
State Capitol, Atlanta
- 13-15 GAEL Winter Conference
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Atlanta
- 16 Leadership GSBA
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Macon
- 18 GSBA Board Chair Workshop
Rural Development Center, Tifton
- 24 GSBA Nominating Committee Meeting
GSBA Offices, Lawrenceville

March 2000

- 3-6 AASA Conference
San Francisco, California
- 9 GSBA Board Chair Workshop
Red Top Mountain St. Park, Cartersville
- 22 Leadership GSBA
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Macon
- 30 NSBA Executive Directors' Institute
Orlando, Florida
- 31 NSBA Delegate Assembly
Orlando, Florida

First Union Full Page Ad- Destination version

GSBA Associate Members Support GSBA and Public Education!

ABC School Supply
3312 N. Berkeley Lake Road, Duluth, GA 30096

A-Lert Roof Systems
P.O. Box 79, Erie, KS 66733

AAA Modular Buildings
P. O. Box 9083, Columbus, GA 31908

American Chalkboard, LLC
100 Barrett Ind. Blvd., Wetumpka, AL 36092

Andrews, Hammock & Powell, Inc.
2325 Ingleside Ave., Macon, GA 31204

Apple Computer, Inc.
904 Iroquois Trail, Goodlettsville, TN 37072

Aramark Corporation
446 State Rd. 13, Ste. 365, Jacksonville, FL 32259

Beers Construction Co.
70 Ellis Street, Atlanta, GA 30303

BellSouth Corporation
1155 Peachtree St., Atlanta, GA 30309

Blue Bird Body Co. National Bus Sales
P. O. Box 937, Ft. Valley, GA 31030

E. R. Mitchell & Co.
2875 Bankhead Hwy., Atlanta, GA 30318

Facility Group/Passantino and Bavier
2233 Lake Park Dr., Ste. 450, Smyrna, GA 30080

Continued in far right column on page nine...

Continued from page one...



NSBA President Mary Ellen Maxwell confers with GSBA Executive Vice President Gary Ashley before addressing conference attendees.

what's to come in the area of technology and learning. He said two issues are driving the need to change the way we think and act on educational issues: brain research and the shrinking middle class.

Mr. Hughes said that as a society we need to look at how children are being raised because current research on how our brain works says that enriching environments will stimulate learning while non-

enriching environments at a young age can actually prevent a child from ever developing certain skills.

One way the shrinking middle class is affecting education is that we're seeing a clearer division between those who have access to all sorts of technology in the home and those who have no access. The problem manifests itself in the classroom by having kids who are starting from square one with technology when they come to school versus kids who might know more than the teacher about using computers and the internet. More information about Mr. Hughes' work can be found on his web site: www.toysrbob.com.

Mary Ellen Maxwell

National School Boards Association President Mary Ellen Maxwell brought greetings from NSBA. She said that NSBA will continue its focus on improving student achievement.

Linda Schrenko

Georgia's Superintendent of Schools Linda Schrenko brought to conference participants the message that,

Continued on page nine...

Parrish Georgia - Half Page ad



Georgia Superintendent of Schools Linda Schrenko

her view, the state has made tremendous gains educationally. She shared a new publication developed by her department that cites statistics showing these improvements.

Timothy Mescon

Dr. Timothy Mescon is a dean at the Michael J. Coles Business School at Kennesaw College and is also a partner in The Mescon Group, an Atlanta-based management consultant firm. Dr. Mescon began his presentation by asking, “What has *irrevocably* changed in the last 10 years?” He said that irrevocable change is triggered by leadership. His presentation, “New Basics for a New Millennium” focused on the areas that leaders must address in order for improvements and change to take place. He defined “new basics” as “Fundamental Beliefs and Assumptions About the World and its People That Shape the Way

Organizations Function.” He outlined the areas of change that leaders must focus on:

- environment
- marketplace/customers
- technology
- people

Dr. Mescon cited qualities that leaders must address within themselves in order for change to happen.

Among them:

- Execute strategy faster.
- Make structure flexible.
- Build relationships first.
- If you want commitment, then commit.
- Don’t wait on education– educate.
- Master change.
- Align the organization to the customer.
- Personalize customer relationships.
- Blend technology and people to add value.

After a thought-provoking and often humorous analogy between the Book of Exodus in the Bible and the “New Basics,” Dr. Mescon told the crowd that “change is the norm, not the exception.”

Continued on page ten...

Associate Members, continued...

First Union National Bank
P.O. Box 740074, Atlanta, GA 30374

Frazier Service Co., Inc.
3286 Buckeye Rd., Atlanta, GA 30341

Georgia Power Company
241 Ralph McGill Blvd., 24th Floor, Atlanta, GA 30308

Ga. School Equipment
137A North 85 Parkway, Fayetteville, GA 30214

Georgia-Pacific Corp.
133 Peachtree Street, NE, Atlanta, GA 30303

H Lloyd Hill Architects & Assoc.
222 Main Street, Gainesville, GA 30501

H + M Construction Co.
P.O. Box 200, Jackson, TN 38302-0200

Heery International
999 Peachtree St., N. E., Atlanta, GA 30367

Hussey, Gay, Bell & Deyoung International
P.O. Box 14247, Savannah, GA 31416

JRA Architects, Inc.
105 W. Tenth St., Ste. 102, Columbus, GA 31901

JAYKAY Sales Co.
P.O. Box 2377, Kennesaw, GA 30144-9105

James W. Buckley & Assoc.
114 North Green St., Swainsboro, GA 30401

Klein & Company
P.O. Box 40, Holly Springs, GA 30142

Continued on page ten...

NSBA Half Page ad

*Associate Members,
continued from page nine...*

Laidlaw Education Services
55 Shuman Blvd., Ste. 400, Naperville, IL
60563

L E Schwartz & Son, Inc.
279 Reid St., Macon, GA 31208

**M. B. Kahn Construction
Company**
P. O. Box 1179, Columbia, SC 29202

Marriott School Services
14 S. Whisper Ct., Columbus, GA 31909

Mid America Management, Inc.
4935 Southfork Dr., 2nd Floor, Lakeland, FL
33813

Moon & Associates
4091 Tilly Mill Road, Doraville, GA 30630

Nalley Motor Trucks
2560 Moreland Ave, SE, Atlanta, GA 30315

National Gypsum Co.
4250 Grand Teton Parkway, Suwanee, GA
30024

National Teacher Associates, Inc.
4949 Keller Springs Road, Addison, TX 75001

North Georgia Turf, Inc.
1487 Blackdirt Road, Whitesburg, GA 30185

nSchool.com
6700 Dawson Blvd., Suite 2C, Norcross, GA
30093

**Oconee Electric Membership
Corp.**
P.O. Box 37, Dudley, GA 31022

Parrish Georgia, Inc.
221 Industrial Drive, Perry, GA 31069

Reid & Morgan
2849 Paces Ferry Rd., Suite 640, Atlanta, GA
30339

Scoreboard Sales & Service
4255 Trotters Way, Ste. 12A, Alpharetta, GA
30004

Software Systems Unlimited, Inc.
1195 Airport Rd., Jefferson, GA 30549

Southern A&E LLC
7800 The Bluffs, NW, Ste. A, Atlanta, GA 30168

**Southern Company Energy
Solutions**
241 Ralph McGill Blvd. NE, Atlanta, GA 30308

Spectrum Industries, Inc.
P.O. Box 400, Chippewa Falls, WI 54729

Sports Turf Company, Inc.
1487 Blackdirt Road, Whitesburg, GA 30185

SSC Services Solutions
406 Willow Ave., Box 19, Knoxville, TN 37901

Suntrust Banks, Inc.
P.O. Box 4418, Atlanta, GA 30302

TECHLAN, Inc.
4900 Mercer University Dr., Macon, GA 31210

Turner Construction Company
3424 Peachtree Road, NE, Suite 200, Atlanta,
GA 30326

United Design, Inc.
7 Posey Street, Savannah, GA 31406

UPS Foundation
55 Glenlake Dr., Atlanta, GA 30328

VALIC
200 Ashford Center, N, Suite 100
Atlanta, GA 30338

Wachovia
P. O. Box 4148, Atlanta, GA 30302



The Awards Luncheon at the annual conference provided a rare opportunity for many past presidents, and one past executive vice president, to gather. Seated from left are: Ron Hopkins (1998-99), Ted Stone (1997-98), Delores McGhee (1987-88) and Wendy Martin (1996-97). Standing from left are: Frank Lowrey (1985-86), Jack Acree (GSBA Executive Vice President from 1961-1978), Ann Woodward (1973-74), Ruth Downs (1980-81), Edith Hambie (1991-92), Tommy Irvin (1968-69), Lamar Reese (1993-94), Clarence Billups (1994-95) and Randall Maret (1995-96).

Tamara Hall

Motivational speaker and former school board member from Montana, Tamara Hall provided conference participants with many ways to look upon the challenges of working in education today with humor. Among her missives:

- Watch out for the CAVE's "Citizens Against Virtually Everything"
- The good old days weren't quite what they are billed as sometimes. She reminded the audience to think about how many abused and handicapped children there were and how those were "subjects not to be discussed."
- Ms. Hall applauded educational leaders for including all children. She admonished our society for sometimes putting "things" above the needs of our "children." She also advised that children need more time with their parents, not more things from them.

"The program offered at this conference has been one of the best," said GSBA Executive Vice President Gary Ashley. "I only wish that every board member in our state could have had the opportunity to hear the information shared. I consider myself to be a lifelong learner and I actually enjoy hearing from experts about various educational issues. The speakers at this conference were exceptional." 🙏

Dealing With Difficult People

By Tom Salter

Robert Kennedy once said "twenty percent of the people are against everything all the time." He may have been optimistic.

You have at least one parent you hear from constantly, and you are counting the days until their child graduates. Then there are those well-meaning, yet slightly misguided individuals who come to every meeting with the cure to every ill, whether real or imagined. Sometimes they are polite, but most often they are loud and occasionally rude. Some want the attention of the media (and often get it), while others are convinced you are brain dead unless you follow their path to salvation. While most are well intentioned, many are at least one french fry short of a Happy Meal.

Dealing with difficult people is trying and can lead to a truck load of bad public relations. But there are some strategies you can use to help satisfy their need for attention, while solving their problem and leaving your scalp intact.

If the exchange takes place at a board meeting, make sure you apply the policies and rules fairly and equally. Don't use the time limit rule only on those who put you on the spot. If a rule limits public comment to five minutes, hold everyone to it. However, it is not necessary, unless your policy dictates it, to hear the same speech over and over every meeting. It is proper to tell someone politely that you have heard their information previously, you have copies of their comments from earlier meetings and unless they have new information to present, you need to move forward with comments from others. If their concern needs to be or already has been referred to a staff member, ask them to give their name and phone number to the board secretary before they leave so that the secretary can have the staff member call them.

If you are caught outside of a structured meeting or if this is the first time this information has been presented, your first duty is to listen. Sometimes easier said than done. We process speech at 500 words per minute, while the average speaker can only deliver 115 words per minute. That leaves lots of time to day-dream, especially since you have most likely heard a variation on the theme before. Stay focused on the words, not on the fact that this person may have been your arch nemesis since before Holmes met Moriarty.

Continued on page eleven...

Continued from page ten...

While listening, remember this person is entitled to his or her opinion. Even though that opinion is different from yours, you have to respect it. Try to keep an open mind. If you start with the perception this person is a nut, you may miss an important point that could have merit.

Also watch your body language. Look at the person while he's speaking. Take a note or two if needed, but give him the respect of looking at him. Don't sit with your arms crossed. That usually indicates you are not interested in what they are saying. Use good posture, keep your shoulders square and your body relaxed.

Many board policies don't allow for responses to public statements. You simply thank speakers for their time and occasionally suggest they take the matter to the superintendent or another staff member. However, if your policy allows response or if the conversation takes place outside of a board meeting, how you react is very important.

Make sure you state your own feelings and opinions frankly, but calmly. Never raise your voice. The louder they yell, the softer you should respond.

Don't try to win, that makes it an argument. Keep the discussion focused on solving the problem at hand. Stick to the present and the future. Generally, it will be destructive to tear open old wounds. The goal is to solve this person's problem.

Keep the discussion on an positive plane. Don't bring up anything that is intended to hurt the other person or put him in his place. If you do, you risk creating an enemy for life.

Move from the general to the specific. If you can find one thing to agree on, you have something to build on. If you can agree that it is Tuesday and the sun is shining, you have a place to start.

As the discussion nears its end, make sure you restate the important points the other person brought up. This shows them you were listening, and that you understand the problem. It also gives your complainer the opportunity to clear up any miscommunication.

If there is something you can do to solve his problem, promise action and then deliver. If there is nothing you can do, be honest. The worst thing you can do is promise satisfaction and then do nothing.

Many people are just mad and need to get something off their chest. If you just listen attentively and don't do anything to increase their anger, frequently these people will be satisfied that they told somebody their problem and that will be the end of it. However, if you take it personally and push back, you are likely

to create a mountain from the proverbial mole hill.

There is a reason the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The sound is intensely annoying and that alone is motivation for those of us who must listen to it to fix it. Likewise, if a squeaky *will* isn't repaired, it eventually will fall off our wagon, leaving us dead in our tracks. Don't back down from what you know is best for children, but listen to others politely and when possible, help them solve their problems.

Kennedy's perception may be accurate. There are some people who you will never satisfy. Just do the best you can. Never attack them personally, always take the high road. Acknowledge their right to their opinion and explain calmly why you disagree. And always remember that your decisions should be based on what is right for children, not what is best politically or personally.

Tom Salter is the managing director of Lewis Communications Educational Public Relations Division. Mr. Salter was a presenter of a special interest clinic at the annual conference. ☞



As of December 14, 1999, the following boards of education have joined previously announced boards in verifying their compliance with the "Standards for Local Boards of Education."

Catoosa County
Dawson County
DeKalb County
Dougherty County
Gainesville City Schools
Lumpkin County
Richmond County
Towns County
Troup County

ATTENTION

Young Artists

Enter the 2000 U.S. Savings Bonds National Student Poster Contest.

It's a fun, educational project and a great way for 4th, 5th, and 6th grade artists to use their talents and learn the benefits of saving. Plus, they can win prizes including a \$200 to a \$5,000 U.S. Savings Bond, a trip to Washington, D.C., and school prizes.

To enter students **must design** a poster promoting the contest theme "U.S. Savings Bonds - Making Dreams a Reality." The contest deadline is **February 11, 2000.**

For your copy of the contest rules visit:

www.savingsbonds.gov

Contact your school or write:

National Student Poster Contest
Savings Bond Marketing Office, Room 309
Department of the Treasury
Washington, D.C. 20226



A public service of this publication.

* Upon issuance, Series EE Savings Bonds are valued at half the face amount.



Publication Policy

Agenda is published bimonthly by the Georgia School Boards Association as a service to its member school boards. GSBA is a nonprofit organization for the state's 180 local school boards, which have joined together voluntarily to improve public education through cooperative effort. The articles published in each issue represent the ideas or beliefs of the writers and are not necessarily the views of GSBA, except where specifically stated.

You are invited to submit articles of 1,500 to 2,000 words dealing with topics of current interest to school board members. The editor reserves the right to determine whether the article is appropriate for the readership. Send manuscripts to Laura Reilly, *Agenda* Editor, Georgia School Boards Association, 5120 Sugarloaf Parkway, Lawrenceville, GA 30043.

Gary Ashley, Managing Editor
Laura Reilly, APR, Editor



Georgia School Boards Association
5120 Sugarloaf Parkway
Lawrenceville, GA 30043
Phone: 770 962-2985
Toll Free: 800 226-1856
FAX: 770 962-5392
FAX: 770 962-1546

GSBA Annex:
2180 Satellite Blvd., Suite 400
Duluth, GA 30097-4074
Phone: 678 584-2285
Toll Free: 877 813-1518
FAX: 678 584-2286

GSBA's Web Site: www.gsba.com

Superintendent Searches: The Status of GSBA's Process

GSBA is assisting in superintendent searches for the following school systems. If you are interested in any of these positions, call GSBA for information on application procedures.

Searches Underway

<i>School System</i>	<i>Application Deadline</i>
Colquitt County	February 25, 2000
Monroe County	January 7, 2000

In the Selection Process

Atkinson County
Clay County
Hart County
Oconee County
McIntosh County

January 3-7, 2000, is School Board Member Appreciation Week in Georgia. Make plans to recognize board members during this important week!

Georgia School Boards Association
5120 Sugarloaf Parkway
Lawrenceville, GA 30043

Have you seen
GSBA's new Online
Policy Services?
Look it up!

www.gsba.com



Stay on target with the news and
information you need about public
education in Georgia!
Visit our web site often!

PRESORT
FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Lawrenceville, GA
Permit No. 135