

St. George MSU Board

Open Letter to the Community



Drawing by Tucker Adams, 7th Grade

*"I joined the school board because I believe in the benefits of a K-8 community school where students are nurtured and learn about real-life issues in their community and beyond. **You don't need to worry about not knowing enough. We are a board because we need a variety of talents and viewpoints. If you are willing to learn, ask questions, and put the best interests of our children first, we need you.**"*

~Jennifer Garrett

Your School Board

Two seats on the St. George School Board will be filled at the election in May and as of this writing no one has yet stepped up to fill them. All the reasons that you may have for not running for the school board don't measure up to the reasons why you should: **this is your school, these are your children, this is your time to lead.** Much has been accomplished since our withdrawal from RSU 13, much is still to be done. If we are to build on our successes to date we need parents to be involved in setting policy and making decisions.

We expect that you may have many questions about the school board's responsibilities and activities so we prepared this brief introduction to answer some of them and to encourage you to dig a little deeper. The material covers basic board authority and responsibilities and highlights some of the issues that the board has dealt with in fulfillment of those responsibilities. We hope that this gives you a sense of the nature of the work and what you can expect should you eventually serve on the board.

"I wanted to be part of the St. George MSU's board because I know excellent public education is essential. A school that is strong, innovative, and responsive to the community can be the heart of a great town."

~Margot Kelley

Why join the School Board?

"My children got a great education through 8th grade at St. George School and I wanted to give back and support the teachers and staff as a board member."

~Sherm Hoyt

Motives matter. Poll the current school board members and you'll learn that all joined the board with a goal to improve education, but none had a plan. We shared a common perspective that centralized, top-down management of education more likely than not stifled creativity, distanced parents from the decisions that affected the lives of their children and discounted the enormously powerful role that community involvement can have in improving education. Our shared **primary motivating goal** was/is to use the opportunity that withdrawal from RSU 13

presented to **build a culture and an organization that was laser-focused on giving each child the best education possible, one that helps them become adults who are self-reliant, socially responsible, and able to adapt to a rapidly changing world.**

When all is said and done ***the primary responsibility of our school board is to define, nurture, protect and enhance a culture that supports that goal.*** We believe that great teachers make great schools and that learning is a 24/7 lifetime activity. We believe that the school and the community are synergistic. A school that is strong, innovative, and responsive to the community can be the heart of a great town, a source of pride and cohesion. We believe in a flat, adaptable and resilient organization, shared decision-making, continuous measurement and improvement. We believe in excellence in all of its aspects.

Qualities of a Board Member

No one board member has all the skills necessary to treat all of the issues that arise and, more likely than not, the board as a whole will find itself periodically reaching beyond its membership for essential skills and knowledge to address topical issues and concerns. ***A quality of primary importance for any board member then is the ability to learn, to have an open-mind, to listen to staff, fellow board members, and the community.*** A good board member is a facilitator, someone whose job is to help make others better at their jobs, a colleague with a sense of humor and an optimist who finds joy in others' successes. A successful board member is also an advocate for the school and the students, intent on assuring that each child receives the best possible education. S/He enthusiastically supports all board decisions

*"A board member needs a willingness to listen and consider opposing points."
~Sherm Hoyt*

regardless of personal opinions and communicates that enthusiasm to the community at large. S/He has an expansive view of education, looks beyond the walls of the school for opportunities for student growth and encourages thoughtfully planned innovation and experimentation. S/He emphatically supports ongoing assessments of all aspects of the educational experience leading to a program of continued quality improvement.

School Board Authority and Responsibilities

Section B of the school policy manual (<http://stgeorgemsu.org/school-committee-policies>) deals with the authority, responsibilities, organization and functions of the school board. We encourage you to read it. It frames the work of the board, its collegial and cooperative nature and the relationship of the board to the superintendent and employees of the St. George MSU. These policies essentially determine the annual work of the board and the specific issues that it will address.

*"What does it take to be a good board member? Patience, flexibility, good listening skills. On top of those, it's helpful to have a range of abilities on the board so that each person has a chance to help in a way that matches her skills and interests."
~Margot Kelley*

Some Practical Examples

To illustrate how these policies apply in practice, below please find a review of the board's work over the past two years – since withdrawal from RSU 13 – in fulfillment of its responsibilities:

- Final settlement of financial issues associated with withdrawal from RSU 13 (Full board engagement in setting direction for the superintendent in discussions with RSU 13);
- Hiring superintendent (3-year contract) and administrative staff (Full board involvement);
- Negotiating new contract with Support Staff (3 person committee comprised of two members of the board and the superintendent);
- Negotiating contract with Teachers Union (3 person committee comprised of two members of the board and the superintendent);
- Developing policy manual for St. George MSU (Full board);
- Establishing high school choice policy and support systems (Full board review, advise and consent);
- Introducing a shared leadership management model (Full board review, advise and consent);
- Recommitting the St. George School to Expeditionary Learning (Full board review, advise and consent);
- Approving Performance Evaluation and Professional Growth (PEPG) Plan for staff (Full board review, advise and consent, board membership on PEPG Committee);

- Reviewing and approving new teacher hires; and
- Reviewing/approving/monitoring annual operating budgets; (Full board engagement, 2 board members on Finance Committee).

Near Term Issues

Some of the above work is ongoing, some cyclical. We need to wrap up contract negotiations with the Teachers Union. There is a need for a five-year plan. A school facilities assessment and plan are needed. A resilient board will need to support the staff response to social and economic factors that influence the lives and learning of our students. And the board must continue to build support for our school within the larger St. George community.

The Election Process

Nomination papers are available at the Town Office. You simply need to get the nomination papers ***signed by at least twenty-five (25) registered voters in the Town of St. George and return the signed papers by April 3rd to the Town Office.*** That puts you on the ballot for voting on the first day of the Town Meeting – May 8th. It couldn't be simpler.

For More Information

To get a sense of the scope of our work and the dynamics of the school board you may want to read the minutes of some of our school board meetings. You can find them on the St. George MSU website (<http://stgeorgemsu.org/school-committee-meeting-minutes>). Also on the site is a policy manual which the board is responsible for reviewing and updating. Finally, we encourage you to reach out to any of the current school board members. You can reach them by email.

Sincerely,

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