

STATE BOE TOO BUSY FOR ONE ISSUE ZEALOTS

by John Richard Schrock

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Five of ten Kansas State Board of Education seats are up for election this round and this is no time to elect one-issue candidates. The state board is a four year commitment. Any narrow-issue zealot elected to the State Board may succeed or fail to win their special issue during one meeting, but that leaves 47 more monthly meetings to handle the real business of the State Board.

That amounts to a hefty ring binder, about a half-ream of detailed business to study and probably debate at each of the monthly meetings. Then there are the briefings on new federal programs with strings attached, legal briefings on redistricting, liaison committees with other agencies, updates on teacher training oversight, and open public forums.

Even if vouchers or evolution (pro or con) are the big issues to you, the work of the state school board in the next four years will involve many other issues with a high impact on schools. Here are more questions to ask, beyond those about the funding shortfall:

‡How do we address the teacher shortage, or are full-time substitutes and waived teachers here to stay?

‡Is the paper-heavy, time-consuming, legislature-mandated QPA system worth it?

‡The last decade has seen a major battle between education proponents of one-size-fits-all teachers and content specialists in a “redesign of teacher licensure.” The state board kept journalism, psychology, chemistry, biology, physics, etc. as separate teaching fields but we lost many other fields. Is there more “fine-tuning” to do?

‡Kansas standards for science, math, language arts and social studies have been written as *guidelines* for assessments and as *suggestions* for teachers. Some states such as Texas make the standards a *required curriculum*, reducing the teacher to a technician. Which direction should Kansas go?

‡Should Kansas join those states that are moving to a “high stakes” competency test for

students to graduate from high school?

‡Education is a “state’s right” but the federal government is taking more control by attaching strings to federal education grants. Some states are saying “no, thank you.” Should Kansas reject federal money in order to maintain independence in educational policy?

‡Some districts in the nation are tying merit pay to the new assessments. Would this work for Kansas?

No elected policy-making body can have all the expertise across the wide range of issues involved. And new issues will always appear. We have been fortunate to have state school board members in the past with the integrity to debate and re-evaluate their positions in the presence of new evidence.

Most of the five board positions up for vote this year will be decided during the primary election on Tuesday 6. Those elected will be doing homework for the next four years. The time for voters to do their homework—is now.

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