

Written Testimony- Merlyn Spare

I believe that serving on a local Board of Education is an honor. It is an honor because of the trust the voting members place in the elected official. As an elected official I offered my character, integrity, honesty, and professional knowledge as tools for my act of service to my community.

I was asked to address why I did not have a conflict of interest by serving on a BOE in one district while teaching in another district.

My interest in serving on a BOE in USD 350 was because my children were enrolled in this district. Just as many whom serve on local BOE they do so while their children are enrolled. Thus they have a vested interest in the district. One must realize that all policies and actions of a local BOE are not the result of one member. There are seven members and each carries equal voting privileges.

As a teacher educator I thought I had much to offer the district in which I resided in. I understood what the classroom teaching was like and was knowledgeable of the many changes the district may be making in our ever-changing educational system.

My serving on the local BOE did not present a "true " conflict of interest. There was no monetary gain. In fact several situations arose where I used my personal leave days to fulfill my responsibilities.

Conflict of interest arises when a BOE members must make a decision that directed affects their child in the case of a disciplinary action Thus in these cases a BOE member would dismiss themselves from the room

Another case may be when a BOE member has a spouse employed by the district. They would dismiss themselves from the meeting if action was taking place that directly affected their spouse.

I was fortunate to have administration help the BOE walk thru anything carefully and keep BOE members informed of any potential conflict of interest.

In small districts you will have "minor" conflicts of interest arise as you have a smaller pool of candidates to which to draw from. And should there be any situations that are potential conflicts of interest BOE members have removed themselves from the room.

So the question is what constitutes a genuine conflict of interest. In the case of a local BOE it would be when a board member enters in the discussion and votes on a decision that has direct impact of monetary gain for the individual. They should not be in the discussion and voting on the decision. In small communities this could happen when there are no other local business to rely on for services. You would have six BOE members who could choose to do business elsewhere or accept doing business with a BOE member. In small communities we need local businesses and services. So it is imperative that we allow the above mentioned practice to continue where member(s) abstain from discussion and action.