

# No Standing News

Since we have no standing, we stand with those left standing.

Volume I

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## Who's in Charge?

Board agrees that Administrative "team" will have "critical role" in selection of new Superintendent.

**Rapier:** *"I am not looking for change, definitely when things are going so well."*

**Bass:** *"...we don't have any really huge problems. When you have problems goals are easy. So when you move beyond what others would consider a high standard..."*

**Giger:** *"Known entities are more palatable than unknown...and we are not interested in having someone come in and upset that applecart."*

**Cavender:** *"I would question anyone who has an agenda to change a lot."*

**Giger:** *"...when it asks what our role wants to be as far as...when candidates come in from other districts, we know people and we want to have the opportunity to call and find out and ask people and get information."*

**Bass:** *"I see you participating in part of the interview process. I see you engaging candidates for part of the day and giving feedback. Linda (Giger) is right. No one knows these candidates better than you or will have the ability to find out things that perhaps there are limitations on what the search people can do because of EEOC and whatever else they function by. I see you playing a very critical role though this entire process."*

**Stratman:** *"We want you all involved. You know these people. We don't want someone who will turn the ship upside down."*

**Blum:** *"I think it is (equally) important that there are not 20-30 people calling the candidates home district"... "If we don't hire your choice we expect all to support that individual. Your individual feelings at that point need to go out the window."*

**Monday, January 14th – School Board meeting with Principals and Directors**

**Mutiny of the "Administrative Team."** At the special January 14th meeting between the school board and the Rolla "Administrative Team," some symptoms of what ails our school system began to emerge. The

"Administrative Team," (ten principals and assorted department directors) flexed their muscles and made it quite clear that they will not only be involved in the selection of the new superintendent, but will also conduct a clandestine background check through their own contacts. They told the board that they have reached such a state of superiority and celebrity that they don't want anyone messing with them. These are the same people who have reports on their desks that the ACT scores in this district are dropping and the last two years of MAP scores were a professional embarrassment. No matter how they spin it for local consumption, or how many Blue Ribbons and Gold Stars they paste over it, when only 15% of students score better than average on basic tests - that's not exactly the cutting edge of excellence, is it?

At the special board meeting, January 8th, with The Bickert Group (search company hired to find a replacement for Ewing), President Randy Stratman confessed that he and board member Frank Blum had a private meeting that afternoon with, what the board fondly calls, "the Administrative Team." During this meeting these "team players" demanded that they dump the search process and hire Westbrook. At the board meeting that evening board members Bass and Rapier said they

wanted to hire from inside and Westbrook was their choice. Dana Rapier called Westbrook "the best administrator in the whole state." (Dana should get out more.)

**Schwalje:** *"I am not sure if this dignifies a response but never have 10 administrators initiated any kind of media campaign to get Dr. Westbrook (hired)...and I was highly offended by No Standing News printing that kind of garbage that implied that we were that petty and unprofessional."* **Monday, January 14<sup>th</sup>**

Without even waiting for the board meeting to end, **Principals Schwalje, Edgar and Giger**, took RDN reporter Amy Wilson out in the hall to announce that all ten administrators wanted to hire Deputy Superintendent Lenoard Westbrook as the new superintendent. Their revolt was the RDN's front-page story on Wednesday. These "team players" (the same that demand every parent, teacher and employee adhere to the chain-of-command complaint system) had now sprung two surprises on their employers. First, they had a meeting with only two board members and a few hours later they had a press conference. They may claim they aren't conducting a media campaign, but when they slip out in the hall while the board is still meeting to get their "Westbrook for Super" announcement on the front page - what is that called? If the non-certified employees had done that, we wonder where they'd be job-hunting right now?

**...run in circles, scream and shout.** Reality has finally reached the planet the school board lives on. The

state auditors will be here in March; Ewing resigned, there's a school board election in 10 weeks, the new budget process has just started (hasn't it?), and state funding for schools is in question for the next few years. Our dysfunctional school board hired a search firm for \$11-15,000 to find a new superintendent and their administrators have hijacked the process and are giving them orders. That's the result of years of leaving everything up to management while the board was busy Visioning and Strategically Retreating. Instead of taking their time to find the best-qualified candidates, the board intends to cram into eight weeks what usually takes six months. Why - what's the rush? Is the "team" not capable of keeping everything running for a few months without a superintendent? Will schools not open next September if this decision isn't made in March? Or is someone inventing a crisis to sabotage the search process? When only a few candidates turn up they can reject all of them and hire Westbrook, just as some said they wanted to do last week. By picking a new superintendent before the April election they also deny the new board a voice in selecting a superintendent they will have to work with. Perhaps the incumbents, Bass and Rapier, assume they have the election in the bag?

**The Bass summons.** The Bickert Group showed up January 8th and found out that they only have until mid-March to find a superintendent. They protested that it takes a minimum of four months to do a legitimate search, background checks and present good candidates for interviews, but Bass and Rapier

would not give. They want the entire process completed and the new guy hired in eight weeks - period. The excuse they used is that if they wait, all the good candidates will be gone because, as we all know, there is a national shortage of superintendents (we do all know that, don't we?). It must be true because Ewing and Westbrook tell the board that all the time...especially before contract time. But the experts in this field, The Bickert Group, told them that just wasn't true. We checked all four of the hottest job markets for educators in Missouri and of 500+ school districts only 6 are advertising for superintendents, so where is all the competition? At the following Thursday board meeting, the board struggled with their self-inflicted, jammed up schedule for this truncated process. They realized then that there would only be a few days available to get candidates in for a very brief interview. Annie Bass declared that if anyone wanted to be considered for this job "they would just have to clear their calendar" for those dates and wait to be summoned!"

**We are an Equal Employment Opportunity employer?** Even before the Monday night offer from the team players to collect evidence on the candidates (see quotes at top), the board had already blundered into several violations of EEO fair hiring practices. Look at the trail of breadcrumbs they've left: Some board members have publicly stated their preference for Westbrook before any applications have been received. Joe Gorman (Key Sports) did a "torch bearer" speech to promote Westbrook, and threw in Berkbuegler, Laub, Giger and Zalis

as candidates. The board had a mysterious unscheduled hour-long closed door meeting with Westbrook on January 10th (we can't wait to see the minutes for that one). In short, the board is now wearing neon "Sue Us" signs. When Bass actually solicited their back door detective work at the special meeting on January 14th, because "... you will have the ability to find out things that perhaps there are limitations on what the search people can do because of EEOC and whatever else they function by," you could almost hear lawyers filing briefs. Imagine that you are a candidate who goes through the interview process in good faith but you find out you were just used to make a rigged process look fair, or you learn your professional reputation was damaged because of unreliable gossip collected by declared fans of the local candidate. The only way they can avoid this legal morass is NOT hire Westbrook. As the guy who handled all district operations while Ewing was...well, doing Ewing things, Westbrook is at least half the reason they're getting an audit by the state. And by the way, if the "team players" have been invited to "go and get information" on candidates, isn't that a green light for everyone else to do their own background check on Westbrook?

**The Site-Based money laundry.** Consider for a moment why ten principals and some program directors should be so panicked at the thought that an outsider may be hired. Hiring outside is always fine for the City of Rolla and fine for the hospital and it was fine when every other school superintendent was hired, but it's suddenly not so fine. There may

be two reasons for their agitation. First, their contracts: Ewing is leaving and the administrators' contract negotiations are due. After all their work getting the levy passed they are expecting their big slice of the levy windfall in this year's contract. If they help Westbrook get the job, he will deliver; but a new boss may not want to make good on someone else's promise.

The other reason may be the threat to their Site-Based Management system (SBM). SBM is the system Ewing and Westbrook set up so each principal gets control of a share of the budget (public tax money) for their building and the authority to spend it. That's power, Bab-e-e! Westbrook told the board about this irregular budget practice last month. As he explained it, if money is "leftover," the principals get to "carry-over" the excess to the next year and spend it at their discretion without "interference" from the board. He reported that the "Site Based Management" system and his carry-over reward system was "working out just fine." Well fancy that, they've found a way to launder budgeted tax money into "clean" unbudgeted slush funds. Naturally they like it "just fine." The board didn't react to Westbrook's comment about SBM because they have no idea how the budget management system works. The site-based "laundry fund" and their control over teacher contracts explains why some teachers always get the paid extra duty and some just get extra duty, why some get to travel and some don't and why parents pay again and again to buy supplies for the classrooms. If you are a school parent, doesn't it make you feel all

warm and fuzzy to know that you paid your school taxes and then paid again for classroom supplies so the "savings" can go into the principal's slush fund?

The "team" players say they want Westbrook because they don't want anyone new "turning the boat around." They want "stability"; they don't want someone with new ideas, someone who will make new demands on them. In short, what they want is a figurehead who can be counted on not to take their toys away. Westbrook helped them establish their Site-Based mini-Empires and in return for their support, he's not likely to rein them in, is he? What we think is this: If these "team players," while earning salaries of \$63 to \$85,700 with very generous benefits, can't measure up to new challenges and new ideas, they should start looking for some nice stagnant backwater where they can sit out retirement on their lazy status quos. They should look for a district that won't be upset that only 15% of students scored above the median on the state MAP tests, a district that won't be bothered that ACT scores are dropping, a district where parents don't mind subsidizing the budget for school supplies, a district with taxpayers who don't want accountability. In that kind of district they would get a whole lot less salary, but that's where "team players" belong who are afraid to prove themselves to a new boss.

**All others - to the back of the bus.** The Westbrook lobby has now had hours of undivided attention of the board. On January 22, the Bickert Group came "to obtain input from groups of the District's constituents."

The schedule the board set up was as follows: "Team players" get another hour and a half and available support staff, parents and the whole community get three and a half hours. Some member of our "One Voice" board authorized candidate Keith Strassner to send out, on Brewer Science letterhead, his personal invitation to the "Business Partners" for a private hour of their own. We hope this little inside boost works better for him on election day than it did on Tuesday because the BP's stayed away in droves. In the evening, from 4-8:00 p.m., everybody else could go to the middle school and give their opinion.

### **What's wrong with this picture?**

The board blundered badly when they agreed to let the "team players" inject themselves into this decision process. Bass even en-Visions them *"engaging candidates for part of the day and giving feedback."* The Bickert survey was sufficient to get opinions from everyone but after that the board should have, for better or worse, made the decision. They let the "team players" turn this into a referendum in which only the "team players" get to vote. Once they made that mistake the only remedy was to give equal time to the teachers and other employees in the same kind of forum, but hundreds of teachers don't even get the courtesy of one hour with the board; teachers must squeeze in with everybody else after work. The "suits" get three meetings on demand and the tacit consent of some board members to commit a violation of federal law by digging dirt on every candidate they don't want - that's everyone but Westbrook. Does the board assume that the "team players" speak for the teachers? Are

the teachers and other employees satisfied with that? If not, they've only got a few days left to say so.

NOTE: The Bickert "Superintendent Needs Survey" is available at <http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/supersurvey.pdf>

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