

## COMMUNITY CORNER **Basics of being a school board member**

When I accepted the challenge in becoming a member of the Clinton Community School District Board of Education, I knew I would have a lot of learning to do. This learning seemed to be arranged into four main topic areas in which I need to continually educate myself in order to do 'What's Best for Kids.'

### **GREGG OBREN**

School board member

- The 5 Basics – a) put students first, b) follow the law and board policies, c) respect the chain of command, d) base decisions on shared, objective information, and e) operate in the public eye.

- Dillon's Rule – Mr.

Dillon was a lawyer and judge that wrote an opinion paper for the Iowa Legislature on the way school districts can operate and what authority is allowed. Specifically, a school district has only those powers expressly authorized by law, as identified in the Code of Iowa. If the law does not specifically articulate it can be done, it cannot be done. This 'operational mandate' must be part of any discussions that are held.

- Iowa Core Curriculum – This is a statemandated, content for classes and graduation requirements in the areas of literacy, mathematics, science, social studies and 21st century learning skills.

- School Financing – In general terms, school financing is a very complex situation and mathematical worksheet. Some key points are: a) the tax revenue our district receives as part of the state budget is a pupil-driven formula, b) the formula results in a maximum ceiling that a district can spend, and c) variables that effect the formula are 'spending authority', 'unspent balance', 'supplemental state aid' ('allowable growth'), 'enrollment counts', and 'supplemental weighting'.

In relation to the last topic – School Financing, Iowa law creates several different funds to be used for educational expenditures. These funds cannot be co-mingled, meaning specific funds received are only authorized for specific types of expenditures.

The funds that are available, and that are currently in use in the Clinton Community School District are:

- SILO – School Infrastructure Local Option – is a one cent sales tax that was voter approved. This fund is currently paying for the building of Eagle Heights and the new Jefferson, which will be paid off in 2017, and the High School complex addition, Bluff and Whittier HVAC upgrades, and now the new middle school.

- Categorical – These dollars are grants, administratively applied for, funding specific activities for a specific duration. We have activities currently in curriculum, teacher salary supplement (TSS), Title I, and After-School, among others.

- Debt Levy - is repayment of a multiyear voter-approved bond for a specific project. This fund is now paying for the renovation of Whittier and Bluff Schools.

- Management Fund — is a voterapproved property tax commitment that can be specifically for costs for early retirement, unemployment or liability insurance only.

- ISL - Instructional Support Levy, is a voter-approved property tax commitment with a specific ending time for instructional supplies.

- PPEL -Physical Plant and Equipment Levy - There are two types: one is a voterapproved multi-year property tax commitment with a specific ending time for repair and maintenance of buildings. This is not currently used. The second type is a board approved levy that cannot exceed 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

- General Operational - is property tax levied and funded by the pupil-driven formula. (This is the fund that receives the most attention in the legislature each year revolving around 'supplemental state aid').

I realize this information might be a 'dry' read, but as the Board starts the process of crafting next year's budget, this information is the cornerstone of the operations of every school district, including ours. 'What's Best for Kids' drives how the decisions are made by our local Board of Directors, and this is the magic we strive to produce by: 1) best meeting the Core Curriculum, 2) maintaining, or reducing, the tax levy, and 3) satisfying the 'quality of life' variables that we all count on to be part of our community.

Gregg **Obren** is a member of the *Clinton School Board*.



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