

LEARN MORE

Readings & Repairs ■ By the Numbers ■ Book Reviews



LIFE ON A SCHOOL BOARD

Working both sides of the fence

Dan Schlafer

Let's just go ahead and call it what it is. I lead a double life and I don't care who knows.

By day I'm the mild-mannered federal programs director and central office supervisor for Tennessee's Monroe County School System. After hours, I morph into a school board member, serving as the Ninth District representative on the Cumberland County Board of Education.

The son of a Baptist pastor, I was taught at an early age that "you can't

serve two masters." Since we're being completely candid here, I hereby confess that I actually serve three. It's also my honor and privilege to sit on the Tennessee School Boards Associations' Board of Directors, doubling as president-elect for our organization in 2009, along with other responsibilities. With all due respect to my dad and *The Good Book*, serving multiple masters is the world I live in and the world I enjoy.

I'm fortunate to work for and with colleagues who understand and sup-

port my multifaceted relationships, while not insisting that I remain monogamous. Serving as a conduit, as it were, for these three entities keeps all of us current.

Having served as a teacher, head football coach, athletics director, and principal for 30 years before moving into my administrator role gave me a clear and present understanding of the challenges and opportunities our teachers and students are presented on a daily basis. Having the chance since 1974 to teach every grade level from kindergarten through 12th grade in public schools, two parochial schools and at the Tennessee School for the Deaf laid a strong foundation for my work as federal programs director.

The experiences I've had as an educator make me look at my work as a school board member through a different pair of lenses than most elected representatives have had the privilege to wear. School board members make decisions and policy determinations that impact their community long after they're gone. Having first-hand knowledge of what's current in public education is an incredible advantage when making decisions for a school system.

Working with the Tennessee School Boards Association puts the icing on my education world cake. This effort adds a statewide and national flavor to the recipe. Advocating for school reform with local, state, and national decision-makers is a humbling and critical task. Networking with educators and elected officials becomes a mutually beneficial and synergistic relationship for all of us, and because of that, our children are the benefactors.

Let's face it. I lead a double life—I wouldn't have it any other way.

Dan Schlafer (dan@monroek12.org) is federal programs director of the Monroe County Schools, in Madisonville, Tenn., and a member of the Cumberland County Board of Education.