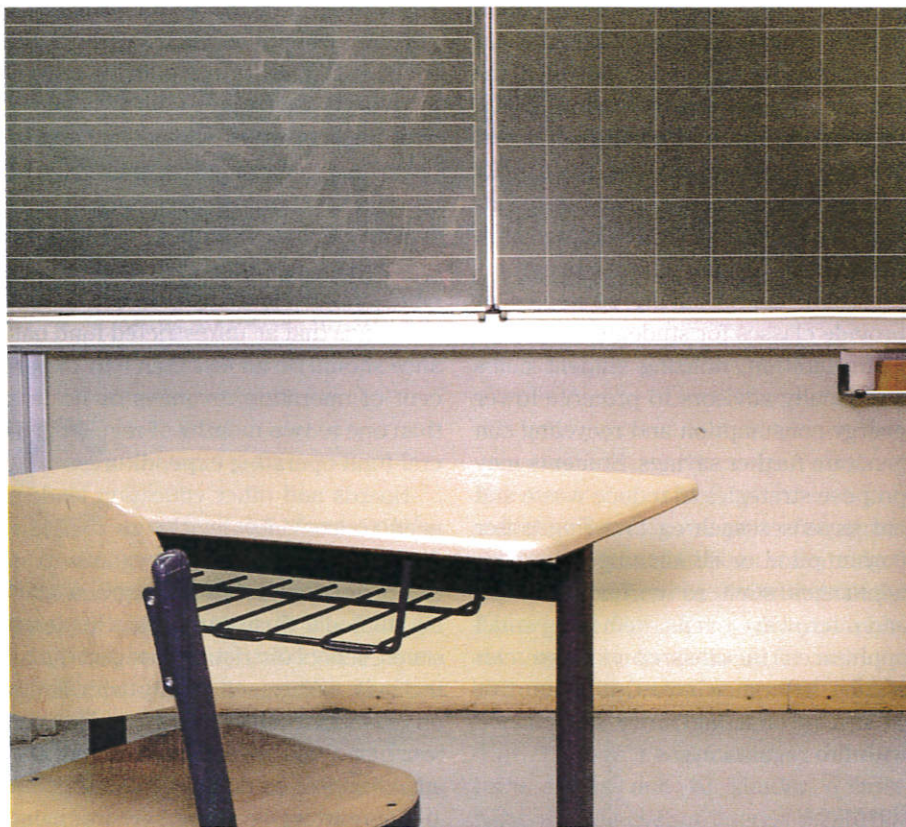


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## LIFE ON A SCHOOL BOARD

### The 'nostalgia vs. new' conundrum

Dan Schlafer

**M**y son and I have an unabashed golf addiction, and with a craving stronger than our local courses could satisfy, we recently decided to make a pilgrimage to Pinehurst, N.C. With a tee time on the Number 2 course—site of both the 1999 and 2005 U.S. Open Championships—we were high as a kite long before we approached the hallowed grounds.

Legends have played there: Bobby Jones, Ben Hogan, Sam Snead, Arnold

Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and Tiger Woods, just to name a few. We were about to stroll through hallowed ground, a place where golfing history has been made.

Anyone who plays golf knows that Pinehurst is famous for its lush fairways and turtle shell greens designed by Donald Ross. And in no uncertain terms, you don't mess with Ross' design.

Anyone brazen enough to suggest a

renovation to the 18th green where Payne Stewart sank a 20-foot nail-biter to win the most dramatic U.S. Open ever would be deemed blasphemous. Add a bunker? Forget it. Change the slope? Get out of town. Tinker with the turf type? Are you kidding? Bulldoze the property to make room for a shopping mall? You'd be shot on sight.

Messing with an icon brings with it a flood of emotions. For school board members and administrators, that statement is never truer than in the area around facilities. Parents, teachers, students, administrators, and the community become immensely attached to the bricks and mortar, halls and classrooms, stadiums and playgrounds where so much of their lives are invested.

Renovate or rebuild? School boards across the country face that question.

Practical and pragmatic planning is critical, especially with our educational infrastructure aging faster than a father waiting for his daughter to come home from her first date. Emotion and community attachment should play a role in your decisions, but as stewards of your taxpayers' money, there is no reason to flush money into a bottomless pit.

In Monroe County, Tenn., where I serve as the district's federal programs director, the board grappled with whether to tear down a six-decade old bastion of educational excellence, build anew, or gut the original to give it fresh life. After much discussion and debate, the board decided to build a new facility. At an open house in early August, the state-of-the-art Madisonville Primary School was unveiled to our community.

It was much more cost effective, and looking at what's in the district's long-term interest, it was the right thing to do.

In Cumberland County, where I serve on the school board, building another secondary school was a much tougher sell. The debate about a new



building versus an addition to the grossly overcrowded Cumberland County High School fell into two camps.

"You're dividing the community" was the battle cry from one corner.

"We're doubling opportunities" was the retort from the other side.

An addition and renovation project would have been a logistical nightmare that would have compromised both the safety of our children and the instruction they would have received while battling construction noise.

Again, the question came down to: Do we stick with nostalgia, or do we build a new school? Fortunately for all, I think, pragmatism won over nostalgia, and Stone Memorial High School now proudly stands in my home county.

If Donald Ross were a school board

member, I think he would be proud. As a designer, he would understand that sometimes it's just better to start over than to tinker with something that worked in the past and does not work now. While history and nostalgia have their place, especially on the hallowed course at Pinehurst, school leaders have to look to the future at all times.

In the case of my two districts, the boards decided to bring their facilities up to par, and the scorecard says they've hit a hole-in-one with the community while doing the right thing for generations to come.

Dan Schlafer (dan@monroek12.org) is a member of the Cumberland County Board of Education and serves on the Tennessee School Boards Association's board of directors. He also is the federal programs director for Monroe County Schools.

## READINGS AND REPORTS

# From the narrowing achievement gap to teacher retention

### Achievement gap narrows

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2009455.pdf>

Mathematics and reading scores on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress were higher for both black and white public school students than they have ever been in the history of the assessment, according to a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Achievement Gaps: How Black and White Students in Public Schools Perform in Mathematics and Reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress*. However, average scores for white students were at least 26 points higher than for black students in each subject.

### Affording an education

<https://www.horatioalger.org/scholarships>

The Horatio Alger Association has opened its scholarship application period for 2010. The association—one of the largest privately funded, need-based programs in the country—awards more than \$6 million in scholarships each year to outstanding students who have responded with strength of character and integrity to adversity and hardship.

### At-risk youth

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/124/1/e81>

A new study from the University of Minnesota says 15 percent of adolescents believe they will die before 35, and



Standing room only at your board meetings when something goes wrong—that's to be expected. But what about when

you came up with a great program—one that increased parental volunteers, raised reading scores, or helped students get college scholarships? Silence.

At *American School Board Journal*, we know you don't get much credit when things go right. That's why we've been sponsoring the Magna Awards for more than 15 years. The Magna Awards are a chance for school boards to get some well-deserved recognition.

Magna winners are honored at the School Leaders Luncheon, held in conjunction with the National School Boards Association's annual conference, held April 10 to 12, 2010, in Chicago. The top three grand prize winners also receive \$4,000 in scholarship money, provided by longtime Magna Awards sponsor, Sodexo School Services.

The rewards don't stop there. Your district's program will be featured in a special supplement to the April edition of *American School Board Journal*. Also, winning programs are added to our Magna Best Practices searchable database, so that other board members and administrators can learn from your examples of excellence.

To apply for a 2010 Magna Award online, go to [www.asbj.com/MagnaNominations](http://www.asbj.com/MagnaNominations). The deadline for entering is Oct. 31. We hope to see you in Chicago.