

SO YOU'VE BECOME A MEMBER OF THE PRESCHOOL BOARD?

You no doubt have many questions about becoming a board member of your cooperative preschool. What does a board do? How does a board member act? Is it worth the time I am going to spend? Those are all questions almost every person asks herself/himself when she/he assumes responsibility as a member of the top governing body of any organization. It might be helpful to reflect on your new role carefully in order to understand it.

Basically, the board of a cooperative preschool determines the broad philosophy of the group and sets the goals of achievement. A new board would find it helpful to spend one of its very first meetings discussing only aims and goals. What are we trying to do for our children and ourselves? What kind of program will achieve these ends? This kind of discussion serves three purposes: (1) It makes clear to everyone the over-all purpose of a co-op preschool. (2) It serves to give the new --- and old --- members of the board a broad framework within which to work all year. (3) It educates and fortifies members with firm conviction about the worth of the program and the importance of their participation.

A board member acts not as an individual parent but as a representative of the members at large. Each parent sitting at a board meeting tries to think and act as she/he sincerely feels the others whom she/he represents think and act. She/he makes it her/his responsibility to talk to other parents to learn what is important to them. She/he tries not to let her/his own prejudices and likes and dislikes color her/his decisions. She/he weighs each decision in these terms: What is good for the whole group, not just for my child, for my convenience, for my pleasure? She/he takes the "long" view of the co-op. How will present decisions affect the group next year?

There are a number of tools or techniques which would be helpful to prepare a board for a satisfying, harmonious, and effective term of office.

1. Learn at least the elements of parliamentary procedure.
2. Follow an agenda. Be firm about it!
3. Encourage meaningful, worthwhile discussion and encourage difference of opinion.
4. Everyone should have an opportunity to speak.
5. Encourage new ideas.
6. Activate members at large by studying application blanks to determine interests and abilities of each member.
7. Support your teacher and help to interpret her role to the members at large. As a board member, you together with your teacher, represent your school both to the members at large and to the general public.

Full involvement in a co-op through its board can be an enriching, satisfying experience. It provides each member with a greater understanding of her/his role as a parent. It promotes understanding of and respect for individuals of many different backgrounds. It gives a sense of accomplishment in a worthwhile community endeavor. It offers organizational experience which will carry over throughout a lifetime. It offers each member an opportunity to have a direct voice in the education of her/his child, an opportunity unavailable to such a degree in other educational institutions.