

ADVISER

What Would You Do If ...

A new wellness policy might offend?

A board was considering a wellness policy that had been drafted by a committee of board-appointed community members. The committee suggested banning all outside food from coming into schools, except for students' home-packed lunches. This included parent-made or purchased snacks for birthday and class celebrations. Several board members were uneasy with this stipulation. The district had a large ethnic population who enjoyed making and bringing to school a certain high-calorie snack that was very important to their culture. They worried that people would see it as a rejection of their culture, not as a health issue. The superintendent said the school-level administrators were also worried about this perception. What should the board do?

■ Boards make decisions best when

there is accurate data to support their decisions. Did the committee base their recommendations on sound data? If so, the board should use the research as a contributing factor in the decision-making.

In many states the law already has requirements for healthy foods and what may or may not be brought from home to school (as well as some federal regulations), so the decision may already have been made for you. The board should check to make sure the new policy complies with state and federal laws.

While it is critical for boards to encourage the community to celebrate its diversity in cultures, the board has an obligation to provide a climate that shows the importance of healthy eating. The district should sponsor an event during the year where the schools can celebrate the ethnic richness that makes up the community, and involve parents and others in the festivities, particularly those that are not related to food.

Nicholas D. Caruso Jr., Senior Staff Associate for Field Services and Technology, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

■ Board-appointed committees can serve a number of important functions. They can assist the board in connecting with the community—always an important role for any elected body. Committees also

might assist the board in the analytical work on a particular issue. Diving into the details on any given topic may be too burdensome for the full board so committees can serve to “lighten the load” for the full board.

Whichever the case, the board of education must represent everyone in the community and should make a decision with that in mind. I suspect that the superintendent and principals are already thinking about how to implement a “ban” on certain foods and the potential impact on the learning environment. The wise board will listen to administration regarding the pace of change and the unintended consequences of moving too quickly.

If banning certain foods is an important step in achieving the board's health-related goals, then lead with conviction. If the pushback from the community only serves to undermine the effort, then perhaps a more gradual approach is needed.

Dean Langdon, Director of Field Services, Illinois Association of School Boards

Advice for the asking: If you are plagued with a prickly problem of school board service or school governance, ask ASBJ. We'll change the names of persons and places. Then, we'll describe the problem and its suggested solution for our readers. Write: Adviser, *American School Board Journal*, 1680 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Or send us an e-mail at adviser@asbj.com, marked “Adviser.” Adviser does not represent official policy of the National School Boards Association, nor should it be construed as legal advice.



Paul Zwolak