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Board's unanimity worrisome

If it keeps discussions from the public and fails to reveal issues.

Democracy can be messy, full of disagreement and conflict, and it can often take its time.

When the Springfield school board casts consistent unanimous votes with little or no discussion on issues that are important to the community, that makes us wonder if there is more effort put into efficiency than the democratic process.

Education reporter Claudette Riley recently revealed that, in the past 12 months, the board cast 109 votes, of which 102 were unanimous.

Board president Gerry Lee

defends the lack of discussion or debate as productive collaboration. We appreciate congeniality and cooperation, but we know that issues as important as budgets and school policy require discussion and even disagreement.



Lee

And the public, who attend the meetings or follow them in the media, can only learn what is happening and why if there is open discussion. Now, they are getting little informa-

tion on which to base their own votes.

One way that board members prepare for the meeting, by their own admission, has been to meet privately or in small

groups. They call the person in charge of a proposal with questions, avoiding running afoul of the state's Sunshine Law, which allows one-on-one discussions without a public meeting.

We remind the board that the spirit of the Sunshine Law is openness and transparency. While a quick phone call can be an efficient way to ask a press-

ing question, it hardly lets the sun shine in on the issue.

A recent controversy over informal informational meetings for the finance committee and other board members demonstrates that this board appears to forget that the public, not just board members, must be informed in order to make this democracy work.

We encourage this board and the newly elected board members who will join the board next month to remember that they are the employees of thousands of voters who care deeply about what is happening in their schools and want to be part of the discourse.

Public discourse requires that the public be invited into the conversation.

OUR VOICE

This editorial is the view of the News-Leader Editorial Board.

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