

Two-Step Decision Making Process for Government
By County Executive Ron Woody
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Recently, the Roane County News reported on a five-option school building program presented to the Roane County School Board.

In this article, I would like to briefly address a decision making process which could assist both the Roane County Board of Education and the Roane County Commission as each board tackles this important community investment decision.

Before I try and discuss the decision making process let me say that “no decisions” about any option nor any changes to the education delivery service have been made. I can speak only for myself in saying that much work is needed to convince me of the necessity of adopting any of the options, but I am highly supportive of a thoroughly studied education program. I firmly believe in the Proverb, “Without a vision (plan) the people perish.”

Major decisions such as the future delivery of educational services should, in my opinion, be addressed in at least a two-step decision making process. The first step being questions and answers passing through technical filters and the second step being questions and answers passing through a social acceptability filter.

Technical filters are applied first in order to narrow the number of options from many to a few viable options. The technical filters ask and answer a host of questions. The social acceptability filter then deals with options that have passed the test of technical filters. A socially acceptable decision is partially arrived at by answering the question, “Does the public accept the technical filter answers as being the right questions with adequate answers from trusted sources?”

The social acceptability filter is a basic agreement between the public and the government that implies that the decisions made by elected officials are acceptable to our citizens. To have a socially acceptable decision, the public must be informed, decisions must be transparent, and elected and appointed officials must be trusted. The public must have confidence in their elected officials’ decisions.

The technical filters start with the big picture view and then narrow the options from there. As we start our decision making process in regards to the educational delivery services in Roane County, two (2) big picture technical filters should start the process.

1. Are we placing students in the correct education path for higher education, technical training, or directly in the workplace?
2. Are our students then prepared for higher education, technical training, or the workplace when they graduate?

If the answer to either of these questions is “NO”, then the delivery of educational services should be studied in anticipation of changing our “NO” answer to “YES.” I think the Roane County School Board has determined that the answer to the first question is “NO” and thus a study of the delivery of educational services in Roane County has been undertaken. Now the options which have been presented by the study must be passed through additional technical filters.

The second question could also be “No.” However, since the balance of higher education, technical training, and immediate workplace paths are not aligned, it is more difficult to answer the second question with a high level of confidence.

As Roane County continues to work through the two-step decision making process additional technical questions must be asked and answered. These questions could include:

Can any of the Roane County High Schools answer question one or two with a “Yes”?

Are our facilities adequately equipped to educate our students in the paths of obtaining higher education, technical training or immediate entry into the workforce?

Do our current high schools have adequate capacity to deliver the educational services needed for each path?

The technical questions are numerous but there must be a means for elected/appointed officials, school administrators, and the general public to have an opportunity to ask and have the technical questions answered in order for a socially acceptable decision to be reached.

The process of addressing technical questions should help us work through the socially acceptable solution. While working through the two step decision making process, we must be respectful of each other by remembering the quote by Thomas Jefferson, “Every difference in opinion is not a difference in principle.”