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ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Thank you for your board service: Resources for new and reelected School Board Members

School board members have an important and challenging job. They compete for a volunteer elected position that pays only a small stipend — or nothing. They are responsible for decisions that affect the well-being and educational opportunities of students in their community, and they must understand and comply with district policy, state mandates and federal regulations. And, finally, they provide leadership for responsibly managing taxpayer-funded resources.

It is a challenging job, and it can be thankless. Sometimes there is also criticism from unhappy patrons. But it is an important job and an essential role that can leave a lasting impact on future generations. District leaders understand this, and they are grateful.

Getting up to speed and staying informed

The work requires informed decisions. To be successful, new board members must get up to speed quickly, and board members with more service time must continually learn background information and new data to understand the action items and respond to questions from members of the community. It may feel overwhelming, but there are many resources to help.

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (360) 890-5781 or (425) 314-0215.

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Your superintendent and professional organizations

Your superintendent is a great resource. They are usually the only staff member managed by the board and are a helpful source of board orientation and professional development opportunities. The first step is to meet with your superintendent and learn about professional education organizations to which the district has a membership. Access member materials from those sites and discuss ideas or questions with the superintendent.

State department of education

In most states, the state department of education provides information about educational standards and testing, resources, contacts and an extensive library of information that can be accessed via the internet. Members of the public can also attend state school board meetings to see the issues at the state level firsthand.

State school board association

Your state school boards association is a valuable source of information and training opportunities. Member districts can access information on the latest legislation related to education policy, state funding and new regulations. Districts can also ask policy questions and access sample policies and templates.

The state school boards association also provides training opportunities regionally and



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statewide. These conferences and workshops can help board members develop skills and knowledge about district business and academic functions.

These events are informative, and board members can build a helpful professional network. There may be occasional questions about using public funds for these trainings, but they are a resource for school board members and are a helpful source of information for school board service. Conferences allow members to share information and solutions among districts without starting from scratch. Your attendance at a session may save the district hundreds of hours in staff time alone.

Conferences also provide training on how to better communicate with the citizens you represent and how to be a better leader for the district. As your individual skills and knowledge improve so does the work of the school board as a whole.

National School Boards Association

Your state school boards association is affiliated with the National School Boards Association. The NSBA website, www.NSBA.org, is an extensive resource for board members with publications, news releases, research, speakers and services for school districts.

Each year NSBA hosts a national conference that draws thousands of school board members from across the country and features nationally known speakers and hundreds of workshops. Board members should plan to attend one of these conferences and encourage fellow board members to do the same. The conferences have sessions on policy topics to help local boards set policy for the district in their own community.

There is also a robust legislative page with information and action alerts for federal and legal advocacy, public engagement, equity and IDEA. Each topic has a link to more detail and resources for boards to get informed on issues or involved in advocacy.

American Association of School Administrators

Another association to which your superintendent and other administrators may belong is the American Association of School Administrators, www.aasa.org. Similar to NSBA, this site includes links to state associations and has information on conferences, policy updates, professional development and other information for school district leaders.

NSPRA

Because much of the work of a school board member is communications and public relations, another source of valuable information is the National School Public Relations Association, www.nspr.org.

In addition to information about workshops and the national conference, the website has an extensive list of publications for purchase and is accessible through the member portal. A large number of handbooks and training manuals by school public relations professionals across the country are available to school districts.

Topics include conducting surveys, setting up foundations, building community support, handling crisis communications, marketing your schools and enhancing school/family/community partnerships.

Each state has a school public relations organization that is affiliated with NSPRA. School board members are encouraged to be members of both the state organization and the national organization. If your district or the public information officer for the district is already a member, ask to read membership publications and newsletters they receive.

Being a school board member is an admirable job, but it can be daunting. There are numerous resources and training opportunities to help board members become more effective. The money a district spends on your conference or workshop registration or your membership in a professional educational organization is just another way of helping you develop as an in-house educational resource.

Thank you for your work on behalf of students. Happy School Board Appreciation Month!

Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant