

Brent Seaks' Report on National School Board Association Conference – Denver (March 24 -27)

Preconference Sessions: March 24th

Attended

Crawl, Walk, or Run – Become a Highly Effective Board (9am -12pm)
A School Boards Guide to the Maker Movement (1:30pm – 4:30pm)

Conference Sessions: March 25th

Attended

General Session – Captain Scott Kelly (8:30am – 10:00am)
Creative Financing for Public Schools (10:30am – 11:45am)
School Boards & Superintendents Partnering on Innovation (1:30pm – 3:00)
Five Steps to Develop a Successful School Volunteer Program (3:45pm – 5:00pm)

March 26th

Smarter School Spending: Budgeting Best Practices (8:30am -9:45am)
General Session – Arianna Huffington (10:00am – 11:30am)
Creating Future Focused, Student Centered Living Spaces (1:30pm – 2:45pm)
Encouraging a Lifetime of Creativity: Building a Community Wide Arts Program (3:30pm – 5:00pm)

March 27th

Organizing Chaos: Using a Facilitated Process Focused on District Priorities... (8:30am – 9:45am)

Crawl, Walk, Run – Become a Highly Effective Board

Learned about the importance of holding both Superintendent Evaluations and Board Self Evaluation each year. Looked at different formats for each. Also learned the importance of the Governance Team (Board and Superintendent) working well together.

Ideas:

- While we have both these evaluations already in place, tweak them to make each even more effective.
- Hold a meeting/workshop regularly between the superintendent and school board to set expectations and align goals. Must have a unified governance team.

The Maker Movement

This is a new approach with a creative hands on emphasis to reinvent, recycle, and innovate with open shared solutions that often utilize technology. Core ideas are making something out of something else... making the impossible happen. The area where this learning happens is called a “maker space”. Idea that we must bridge vocation versus academic educations. “Making” adds enhanced expressiveness, precision & reliability, ability to create real things, and making complexity accessible. As workshop participants, we had the opportunity to “make” and experience this style of learning firsthand.

Ideas:

- At the very least, we could offer electives or afterschool opportunities for kids to create and learn in this manner. Ideally, this style of learning is implemented at all our school and integrated as part of the curriculum perhaps.
- Perhaps we could consider making Berg a type of magnet school which focuses on this style of learning. We may get parents who want to sign their children up to experience this style of learning.

Creative Financing for Public Schools

This workshop was led by Dr. Rocky Killion who served as the Superintendent of West LaFayette, IN. One of the key concepts was that we have to promote and tell what is great about our school district. We have to actively engage the community. They hired a professional pollster to gather useful information from their stakeholders. They also had a volunteer program in their school district that had 700 volunteers involved in three of their elementary schools in a Read to Succeed Program. Not only did this help students, but it also was a way for the community to see first-hand what was happening in schools. With public support high, they were able to raise \$317,000 in private funds through two fund raising events. They also were able to pass an operating referendum of \$28 million. We must tell our story now state our case and prepare for the future. In one of their commercials supporting their referendum, they had a local respected retired doctor say, "I don't want to pay any more in taxes... but don't mess with our schools".

Ideas:

- We should and must celebrate our strengths with our community and tell our story using social media, print, video, local news, etc.
- Hiring a professional polling company may make sense if and when it is time to have a referendum.
- We too could raise money in private campaigns if we can demonstrate need

School Boards & Superintendents Partnering on Innovation

This workshop was all about districts creating their "graduate profile". This is a critical initial step so that a district can work backwards to achieve that profile goal. Employers are no longer looking for skills in math, science, English, and social studies but rather skills in content mastery, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. We can create this profile for free on the profile of a graduate website. One school district handed out plastic plates with their profile of a graduate sticker on it. "They told the teachers, this is not one more thing to put on your plate.... It is your plate."

Ideas

- We must create a graduate profile as soon as possible and use that as a starting point to update our strategic plan.

Five Steps to Develop a Successful School Volunteer Program

This workshop was led by the part-time volunteer coordinator for the Pewaukee Public School District. She worked 20 hours per week (8pm to 1pm Monday-Thursday) for \$20 per hour and accomplished amazing things. She did recruitment, development, engagement, retention, and celebration. They had programs such as “Expert Listening”, “Math Mentor”, and a “Lunch Bunch” program. Last year they had over 1,300 volunteers providing over 32,000 hours of volunteer work. As an extra benefit, the volunteers became excellent ambassadors for the school. Data from these volunteer programs showed students had higher self-esteem and improved test scores.

Ideas

- This might be a new strategic plan item. It is certainly worth looking into hiring a part-time volunteer coordinator when you think of getting 32,000 volunteer hours raising not only student achievement but also community support.
- We should also celebrate the volunteer success we have in our district such as the Dickinson Backpack Program.

Smarter School Spending: Budgeting Best Practices

The Government Finance Officers Association offers resources, publications, training and consulting regarding best practices and financial management. Best practice budget aligns the budget with student achievement goals... strategic plan drives budget. Traditional budgeting falls short because it uses incremental budget model that is more reactionary than proactive. Limited resources drive spending plan, and it is more focused on current year challenges than multi-year strategies. The five key areas of a best practice budget include: Plan & Prepare, Set Instructional Priorities, Pay for Priorities, Implement Plan, Ensure Sustainability. Districts should assess regularly and ask: What works well? What doesn't work well? What would we like to see improved? Districts need to establish financial policies. Must use SMARTER goals for strategic plan. Also must ask “5 whys” which allows you to determine the core issues to deal with.

Ideas

- Consider sending new Business Manager and staff person for best practice budget training.
- Form appropriate financial policies
- Update our strategic plan so we can use it to drive budget

Creating Future Focused, Student Centered Living Spaces

This workshop talked about how to transform spaces from where we are not to where we want to be. We saw working examples of them changing old spaces into popular usable spaces. One example was a library which no one was using and after renovations that had 150 kids in there all the time. It became so popular that they had to change the bus schedule later.

Ideas

- Consider needs in schools and spaces we could renovate and repurpose
- On a larger scale, we could look at doing this process for the entire high school and Berg. There are companies that specialize in assessing facilities and doing the work.

Encouraging a Lifetime of Creativity: Building a Community Wide Arts Program

88% of parents surveyed nationally think the arts are part of a well-rounded education. Kids in arts score higher on the SAT, are more likely to graduate, and more likely to earn a bachelor's degree. This school district started "Art Month" for the month of March. They got community involvement and were able to offer an art event 26 days out of the month. This included dance performances in local community theaters, art shows, concerts, etc. There were able to get great community support and involvement which benefited their district in other ways.

Ideas

- We should consider ways to further promote the arts in our district
- One attendee shared that their Athletic Director and Arts Staff worked together to plan dates and practices so that more athletes could be involved in the arts and vice versa. We should also see if that is possible

Organizing Chaos: Using a Facilitated Process Focused on District Priorities...

Hiring a Superintendent is the most important job a board does, and all boards must do it sooner or later. It is great if you have at least a year's notice. This workshop was given by a Board President and consultant. They first emphasized that hiring decisions should be based on data not emotion. They recommend using a consultant and not doing it alone. The components of the selection process are: stakeholder input, advertisement & recruitment, receive/review/and screen applicants, finalist selection, reference checks, interview activities (guides & rubrics), and final selection. Some advance steps prior to hiring include: identifying board member priorities and stakeholder priorities, establishing desired leadership attributes/skills/abilities, establishing hiring timeline. It is important to have a comprehensive process that includes a rubric measuring: Application Materials, Writing Prompts, Stakeholder Interviews, Board of Education Interview, Presentation of Action Plan, Data Analysis, and Reference Checks. They emphasized that you had to have "blind" information on the rubric so that all candidates have unbiased opportunity.

Ideas

- Keep this information in a place where it can be found when it is needed someday. Ask Superintendent to give school district as much time as possible when then plan on leaving.

Brent's Summary of Priority Action Items for Board of Directors:

- Meet as a governance team to clarify objectives, goals, and expectations for the year
- Determine Profile of a Graduate and plan how we accomplish this goal
- Have the strategic plan updated with SMARTER goals (specific, measureable, attainable,
- Work to intentionally engage community/stakeholders
- Review/update/create financial policies as needed