



The Role of the School Board in Responding to the Coronavirus

With the uncertainty surrounding the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the public is looking to their school district governance leadership teams to provide a unified message to employees, parents, and the general public.

Meetings, events, and normal routines are being interrupted all over the world. They have likely changed in your district as well. Providing education and delivering services may look different than you have seen before.

Your board and superintendent have vital and unique roles to play as this unprecedented event unfolds. With the situation changing daily, effective governance practices are as important as ever.

Here's what the governance team can do to best serve their district.

The School Board and Superintendent Should Stay Connected

Social distancing is the watch word, but boards need to stay together, even if at a distance. Though in-person meetings are discouraged, stay in touch with your governance team members. Stay connected with your community. They are looking for your district's calm and capable leadership.

The Missouri Attorney General has published [Sunshine Law Guidelines During the Coronavirus Shutdown](#). MSBA has a variety of [COVID-19 resources](#), including [Social Distancing: Can School Boards Meet Virtually?](#), [How to Hold an Emergency Meeting and Comply with the Sunshine Law](#), [Public Comment and Virtual Meetings](#) and much more. If you have questions about compliance with the Sunshine Law or other laws, contact the MSBA Legal Hotline at 800-221-6722.

The leadership team should be thinking about how remote meetings will work when trying to involve the wider community in these times, too. Proactively seeking community partnerships (private and public) to extend web access into the community is one option to explore. MSBA resources regarding meetings include:

- [Can We Ban the Public from Our School Board Meeting and Live Stream It Instead?](#)
- [Public Comment and Virtual Meetings](#)
- [Can the Board Discuss the District's Response to COVID-19 In Closed \(Executive\) Session?](#)

As your team discovers what works best for remote meetings and distance learning, please share those practices and resources (digital or analog) with MSBA at info@mosba.org.

Let Your Superintendent Lead

Remember, it is the superintendent's responsibility to manage the district. They need to make most operational decisions at this time. The superintendent and his or her staff who are making difficult decisions for the district without the luxury of long deliberation and precedent. The Board directs district employees to do what is necessary and good for the community based on the best information at the time, within the limits of the law.

Keep in mind, the board may need to meet more frequently during this health emergency by teleconference, videoconference or other legal means so that essential decisions that require board approval may be made as quickly as possible. Some district policies may need to be suspended or modified temporarily to adequately respond to the emergency.

Allow your superintendent or other designated spokesperson to continue to be the voice and face of your district. Demonstrating the chain of command is as important as ever to reduce confusion and instill confidence among staff and within the community.

Stay in regular contact with your superintendent, conduct regular board meetings and call emergency board meetings only when the meeting is necessary for the good and welfare of your district. MSBA has drafted a sample [Resolution in Response to Health Emergency](#) that addresses some of these issues.

Convey a Unified Message

Make sure your district maintains a unified public message. It is important to rely solely on the board president and the superintendent or designee to provide information to the public regarding the district response to the emergency. Board members will not attempt to summarize information on personal social media platforms or other forms of communication, but instead direct all community members to official district communications.

Promote messages that are:

- Supported by your full governance leadership team
- Clear, calm, and reassuring
- Factual (E.g., "Here's what we know, here's what we are doing, here are organizations we are working with.")
- Showing leadership in communicating about and demonstrating safe health practices. Schools are often the primary source of information about health and nutrition.

Take time to connect with your community, too. Collaborate with your superintendent to provide regular communication with the community. Share positive messages about the district. Share hope, gratitude, and compassion in a world facing panic and a pandemic.

Online Learning Opportunities for School Boards

MSBA is focused on everyone's health and safety as we continue to monitor the implications of COVID-19. Some of our events are being canceled or postponed. Look for announcements in the MSBA Weekly email. There are still numerous continuing education opportunities available.

- MSBA has developed a [page on COVID-19 Resources](#) that are updated regularly.
- MSBA [Spring Regional Meeting program content](#) will be available for viewing on our website soon. Board members and governance teams will be able to earn core meeting credit.
- A variety of online training opportunities can be found [here](#).
- This might be a good time to consider a [Board Self Evaluation](#). MSBA staff can facilitate a virtual discussion of the results or you can do it on your own.

If you have governance questions or want to explore continuing education opportunities contact the Leadership Development Department at training@mosba.org or call (573) 445-9920, ext 329. These are uncertain and unprecedented times. School boards have historically demonstrated stable leadership and we are confident you are leading the way in your communities now. We are here to support you in this journey.

Adapted with permission from the Texas Association of School Boards, March 2020