



A monthly publication from the Nebraska Association of School Boards

MARCH 2018

Upcoming Events

Spring Legal Workshops
March 28 | Fremont

NSBA Annual Conference
Be Extraordinary
April 7-9 | San Antonio

Day 60 of the Legislative Session
April 18

NASB Member Golf Outing
June 14 | Kearney

School Law Seminar
June 15 | Kearney



PAPERLESS, PROPERTY TAXES & THE PRICE OF PROGRESS

The following article was published nationally in the American School Board Journal.

Nebraska. The Good Life. Middle of nowhere? No, in the middle of it all. A state made up of metropolitan areas, the plains, sandhills, reservations and dramatic rock formations. The name itself means “flat water” after the Platte River which runs west to east through the state.

It is the home of Arbor Day, so you could say Nebraskans know a little about trees. Planting them. Caring for them. And doing our part to save them. More on that in a moment.

Nebraska has 1.9 million people living in 531 communities. It has around 312,000 students attending 250 public school districts ranging from enrollments of almost 53,000 students to 73.

Nebraskans love their public schools. So much so you likely won't go a day in this state without seeing someone in their I “heart” Public Schools t-shirt. That said, Nebraska ranks 49th in its financial support of public schools, with only 33% of the funding coming from the state while the national average is 47%. This translates to schools in Nebraska receiving half of their funding from local property taxes, compared to the national average of 29%.

What does this mean? It means that Nebraska's 1,724 locally elected school board members serving these 250 districts must keep a keen eye on their spending, so as not to generate a narrative, right or wrong, that school spending is the cause of what are currently much higher than average property taxes in the state.

Nebraska hasn't found its coal, oil, or mega-theme park tourist attraction yet to generate ridiculous amounts of state revenue. What Nebraska does have is valuable agricultural land. What Nebraska also has right now, are lower than average commodity prices. A bad combination.

Enter the state school board association, always looking for efficiencies and ways to save their members money while enhancing deliverables, who implemented an idea to do just that. This is the story of paperless board meetings.

Continued On Page 2

Raymond Central Public Schools

Board of Education
Harriet Gould - President
Scott Black
Matt Blanchard
Brad Bretkreutz
Lori Springer
Susan Urbom

Derrick Joel - Superintendent

Home of the Mustangs

Enrollment = 690
NASB Region #10

www.rcentral.org

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Back in the olden days, those 1,724 board members went through an exorbitant amount of paper. Time and money was spent creating and assembling board packets, minutes, handouts, additional versions, you name it. Not to mention countless papercuts.

Archived minutes were bound and filed away only to become that needle in a haystack if and when they needed to be referenced down the road.

All of that changed in 2012 when the Nebraska Association of School Boards, through their wholly owned, for-profit C-Corporation Sparq Data Solutions, created and implemented an online system of paperless board meeting software to streamline the process electronically, freeing up the board's hands and minds by giving them instant, online access before, during and after each meeting.

Designed with the school board specifically in mind, this user-friendly service is intuitive enough for the tech-savvy 20-something serving their metropolitan district, to the 43-year veteran of the board serving their rural school district. Have laptop, will travel. Piles and files of paper are now streamlined digitally, instantly archiving information from past meetings, not only for the board and their meetings, but for the public to access as well.

Now, five years later, over half of Nebraska's districts are running their board meetings through this paperless system, including the state's two largest districts, Omaha Public Schools (52,836) and Lincoln Public Schools (41,737).

One of the newer districts to utilize what is now branded as Sparq Meetings is Raymond Central Public Schools.

Raymond Central is a growing, rural district, about 30 minutes from Lincoln, Nebraska's capital city, with just under 700 students, and an operating budget of \$9.5 million dollars. They have a fairly new, but progressive board, and a Superintendent in his first year at the district.

A casual meeting for coffee and discussions with the board, superintendent and other users of the system quickly generated a common theme. Agendas. Ease. Access.

Oh, and paper. No more lugging around packets of paper. No longer wasting tons of paper. There was a sense of pride and progress in having sound environmental policy and becoming a greener district. Across the board, there was an agreement that progressing to a paperless system was one of the better moves they could have made, on multiple fronts, with one school board member emphatically stating, "Awesome system!"

Hearing that, I had to get more insight on just how awesome the agendas, ease and access were.



Raymond Central Board of Education: (l to r) Scott Black, Lori Springer, Harriet Gould, Susan Urbom, Matt Blanchard & Brad Breitreutz

AGENDAS

"It is a one-stop-shop."

Agendas are posted by the administrative staff the Friday before the district's board meetings, giving the board time to look everything over during the weekend. Minutes are kept in time, electronically by the district secretary, with the board president navigating the system. "I could not imagine creating or running a meeting without it," said Superintendent Derrick Joel. "It is a one-stop-shop for all documents, rationale, voting, agendas, minutes, etc. Using the paperless system has saved the cost of paper and time preparing the agenda with all supporting documents."

Board President, Dr. Harriet Gould echoed those sentiments, "Dr. Joel and I collaborate on the agenda and have a format that we've adapted to fit our district. I really like the transparency we can offer our patrons with this format."

EASE

"The more you use it the easier it becomes."

The ease of getting the information prior to each meeting in an easy to manage electronic form has become a huge asset to the Raymond Central board. Comments and notes can simply be added into the system itself vs being handwritten into an already bound packet prior to, or as the meeting progresses. Said one board member, "I was skeptical at first, but am now sold on it!"

ACCESS

"We sometimes would not get the board packet until the night of. Things are in the fly."

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From the board room, your home, the office, harvesting a field, or relaxing on a tropical island, if you have a computer, smartphone, or tablet, you have access to Sparq Meetings. Anyone with a device can follow along. With the click of a button, the meeting is published and open for the public to view on the school website. That was not always the case.

“I know firsthand the amount of time we used to spend on pulling the Board packet together,” said Dr. Gould. “It took the superintendent’s secretary so much time and then she either mailed them or delivered them to our homes. This system can be built and saved to the agenda from one meeting to the next. We’ve saved reams of paper, administrative assistant time in copying the packet information and then collating it, mailing or driving it to school board members’ homes. It is saving the district time and dollars!”

“When I came onto the board, I couldn’t understand why we hadn’t gone to this format. I encouraged the district to look into this,” said Lori Springer, Board of Education Secretary. “In my opinion, we made an excellent decision for all involved! The creators put in a lot of thought and made a product that caters to individuals who come from all skill levels in regard to technology.”

Awesome indeed. To see how changing the way just one board conducts their business has impacted the district and a community like this is refreshing. From skepticism to smooth sailing, Raymond Central now has six boards members, energized, engaged, and working with their administration to better serve the students within their buildings, by breaking down the barriers of time and transparency, allowing more time for productive meetings. The time, cost and ease versus a previous system of paper is invaluable, and definitely worth the price of progress.

The NASB Board Spends St. Patrick’s Day Serving You

This past Saturday, the NASB Board of Directors met in Lincoln for one of our five annual meetings to better serve you and your board on both short-term solutions while working towards a long-term vision for school board members in Nebraska. Key items discussed included:



- How we can organize the NASB staff and Board to best serve you, our members
- An update on the legislature and the advocacy work of school board members across the state
- Continuing our work on the top two issues identified by you at Area Membership Meetings, focusing on the Whole Child and Teen/Youth Employment
- Adopting a resolution to guide the strategic planning work of the Whole Child Project board
- Formally launching Sparq Data Solutions as a wholly-owned, self-sustaining technology company
- Approving our annual budget, with no dues increase for members
- Planning a membership engagement survey for current members
- Introducing a new handbook, “Preparing to Serve” for those considering board service

Thanks for all you do for your board, your community and the entire state by serving public education in Nebraska.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. E. Bower".

Crete Public Schools: Planning for Success



As more and more districts work to beef up, or create their strategic plans, from time to time, we want to update you on what others around Nebraska are working on.

Crete Public Schools, located roughly 30 miles southwest of Lincoln is in the middle of planning for future success through the development of a strategic plan. They started the process in November, assembling a team of teachers, staff members, parents, community members, and business owners to organize, collaborate, and communicate an effective plan for the next five years. The 30-member team started by reviewing and revising a Mission Statement, discussing Parameters and Beliefs Statements, and have worked to find five areas they would consider as Action Items.

So far, the process has helped the communication and collaboration between the school and community. Crete is home to a number of Spanish speaking families, so it was important for the district to have interpreters available so as many constituencies as possible could share their input.

The plan is to be finished this June and will be presented to the Board of Education for their consideration in July, so it can then be implemented in time for the start of the new school year. The finalized plan will be reviewed each year with the community as an opportunity to share successes, and areas for growth.

"It's relatively early in the process, but I am enjoying the committee work. I feel the conversations are spot-on and ultimately we will work toward an important set of strategies for the district and in support of our students."

- Joel Weyand - President, Crete Board of Education

Crete Public Schools

Board of Education
Joel Weyand - President
Julie Kozisek
Justin Kuntz
Bill Lorenz
Greg Mach
Scott Piening

Mike Waters - Superintendent

Home of the Cardinals

Enrollment = 2,148
NASB Region #1

www.creteschools.com

ANNUAL NASB MEMBER GOLF OUTING

JUNE 14 | KEARNEY COUNTRY CLUB



EMAIL SENDORF@NASBONLINE.ORG TO PARTICIPATE

Rely on NASB's Natural Gas Programs

NASB's natural gas programs were created to fulfill two needs that many local districts had in dealing with utility costs – competitive prices and budget certainty. NASB has over 100 school districts and ESUs across Nebraska participating in our NJUMP and CJUMP purchasing consortiums to leverage their purchasing power and achieve lower utility bills.

Rather than pricing the entire year's gas needs on one day, the consortiums lock in fixed prices as market opportunities become available by purchasing in layers over time and in percentages of total projected volumes. Historically, this approach has achieved a better price for natural gas with a higher level of budget certainty than the districts could have achieved on their own.

After a year's experience in the CJUMP program, Ord Public Schools Superintendent Jason Alexander said, "The CJUMP program has been very competitive price-wise and has made the purchasing process for natural gas very painless."

The Nebraska Joint Utilities Management Program (NJUMP) purchases natural gas for school districts and ESUs on the Black Hills Energy natural gas pipeline in southeast Nebraska. Choice Joint Utilities Management Program (CJUMP) supplies natural gas on the SourceGas distribution system in northern, central and western Nebraska. Both programs operate as independent Interlocal Pools created and governed by their own Board of Trustees drawn from consortium members. The trustees hold their annual meeting at the State Education Conference in LaVista each November. NJUMP works with CenterPoint Energy Services, Inc, as its program administrator. CJUMP works with Public Alliance for Community Energy (ACE) in a similar capacity. Both companies provide a wide range of energy products and services to various users of natural gas and can provide an individual user analysis for interested school districts or ESUs.

Now is the time to sign up for membership in NJUMP or CJUMP for the 2018-2019 heating season. For more information, NASB members on the Black Hills Energy distribution system can contact Brenda Christensen of CenterPoint Energy Services at 888-710-4707 and members on the SourceGas distribution system can contact Mandy Heermann of Public Alliance for Community Energy at 800-454-4759. Jim Luebbe of the NASB staff can also discuss the program with you and help you enroll in this time-saving, dollar-stretching consortium.



LEADING WITH A PURPOSE

"Board presidents know the importance of creating a positive culture on the board, but we do not always have the knowledge and resources we need to make it happen, that is what I really like about the President's Retreat. It has helped me to be a better leader!" ~Attendee of the 2018 Board President Retreat

The effective board is marked by certain characteristics, one of which includes a board president who embraces their role of Leading with Purpose.

This year the Association hosted the fifth annual President's Retreat. The Retreat agenda includes a tremendous opportunity to network, learn about the roles and responsibilities of the president, and the impact of effective leadership. Due to the growing interest in this learning workshop, staff expanded the site locations to support attendance in 2015.

While reflecting on the five-year anniversary we also celebrate the 186 board members who have participated in the retreat over the last five years. We appreciate the commitment of our members who grow in their volunteer role and understand the importance of regular, consistent, and effective professional development.



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To learn more, and register, visit the Events tab of www.NASBonline.org



Spring Legal Workshops

March 13 | Gering March 14 | North Platte March 28 | Fremont

Two down, one to go! One of the most important tasks board members and administrators may face deals with due process hearings, including closed sessions and other legal and procedural issues. It is here where so many questions arise:

- What are the due process requirements?
- What responsibilities do board members have?
- What is the role of an administrator in a hearing?

Lawyers from the Nebraska Council of School Attorneys (NCOSA) will address these and other issues with real world examples in an interactive format with questions and answers throughout. Board members and administrators will come away with knowledge regarding the practical application of the law, and written materials for ongoing reference.

Nebraska Reception at the NSBA Conference in San Antonio | April 7

Save the Date: Annual NASB Member Golf Outing | June 14

Save the Date: School Law Seminar | June 15 | Kearney

Bringing the Midwest to the Riverwalk Nebraska Reception at the NSBA Conference

Saturday, April 7 | 4:00 to 7:00 PM
Smoke - The Restaurant

RSVP to Sharon Endorf at sendorf@NASBonline.org
Conference attendees and their guests are welcome to attend



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Final Day of the 2018 Legislative Session | April 18

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Save the Date: School Law Seminar | June 15 | Kearney

NASB Orientation | July 18

Candidate Workshops | Summer 2018

NAEP Workshops | July 2018 | Gering, Kearney, Lincoln & Norfolk

Area Membership Meetings | August to October

100th Annual State Education Conference | November 14-16 | La Vista



Learn more on all of the above and more under the EVENTS tab of www.NASBonline.org



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Leading with a Purpose

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Mark Your Calendar & Register

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

SPRING LEGAL WORKSHOP
March 28 | Fremont

NSBA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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NASB MEMBER GOLF OUTING
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