

Jefferson County Public Schools Board of Education

Effective Governance Retreat Summary

July 14-15, 2017

Junior Achievement of Kentuckiana, Louisville

July 14, 2017

Kentucky School Boards Association staff members facilitated an Effective Governance Retreat for the Jefferson County Public Schools Board of Education and Interim Superintendent team on Friday & Saturday, July 14 & 15, 2017. Local School Board Attorney, Frank Mellen and JCPS Director of Strategy, Jonathan Lowe also attended the retreat. During the 10.5 hours of time together the team discussed various topics pertinent to their roles and responsibilities as a school board/superintendent team.

The workshop began with a discussion of expectations for the work that would take place over the next day and a half. Ideas generated included:

- Team building
- Strategies for effective, efficient discussions
- Recognize that even though methods may be different, the goals are the same
- Start to develop structures for board work
- Ability to deliberate as 7 individuals and govern with 1 voice
- Begin to become good consumers of information
- Develop next steps for continuing the work begun at the retreat
- Develop standard operating procedures
- Agree on how to work together before and after voting on an issue
- Recognize the significance of public perception
- Begin to model an effective leadership team
- How to effectively communicate a common message
- How to become the voice of the board to the community

KSBA facilitators also encouraged the participants to acknowledge problems in the district but focus on improvements and by the end of the 2nd day have a better understanding of their team and identify at least one important idea to take from the retreat and put into practice.

Guiding principles and ground rules for effective discussions were identified and agreed upon by the facilitators and board/interim superintendent team.

- Show appreciation for each other
- Engage with others thoughts and opinions
- Forward focused
- One person speaking at a time
- Open honest conversations
- Be willing to have difficult discussions

- Challenge ideas, not people
- Demonstrate respect and empathy
- Stay focused on governance
- Actively listen
- Be open-minded
- Minimize distractions

Important ideas and issues unable to be fully addressed and resolved during this retreat, were documented for discussion by the board/interim superintendent team at a later date. These topics were placed in the “Parking Lot” and included the following:

- Review/update ethics policy
- Issues surrounding speaking to media
- Committee structure
- Policy development adoption
- Public comment procedures

KSBA facilitators led the board/interim superintendent team in the discussion of the job profile of a Kentucky school board member as well as the leadership roles of a school board. Conversations were held on the importance of establishing trust, leadership and communication as they carry out their specific roles and responsibilities of an effective school governance team.

One hour of “*The Ethics of School Board Service*” training was also provided for the team.

July 15, 2017

Day two of the retreat began with a recap of the first day of activities followed by an hour of training on effective “*School Board Governance*”. During that session, the team agreed on what board governance looks like for JCPS including:

- Checks and balances
- Vision and goals
- Monitor and provide oversight
- Bring community to the board

With a greater understanding of effective board governance, KSBA facilitated conversations about what is working well at JCPS, what works well for the JCPS BOE, and what are some areas for discussion and possible improvement.

What Works Well at JCPS

- Dedicated staff
- Board supported strategic plan

- Talented teachers
- Goal clarity coaches & Professional Learning Communities
- Parent support for their schools
- Extra opportunities for students
- Diversity of thought
- District size
- 5 X 5 Arts Program
- High school talent academies
- System efficiencies
- Focus on student learning
- Strong teams
- Financial support for the district
- Competitive teacher salary

What Works Well for the JCPS BOE

- Communication and clarity from interim superintendent
- Board member commitment and investment
- High expectations
- High level and strong discourse
- Learning as a board member
- Data driven
- Champions of public education

Areas for Growth and Improvement

- Staff diversity
- Communication and interaction ***
- Information
- Facilities
- Board Committees *****
- Clarity of expectations
- Recognizing progress
- Spirit of collaboration & compromise***
- Controlling the narrative
- Focus on student learning and achievement in BOE meetings
- Funding of schools based on students
- Student assignment
- Board meeting efficiency (agenda)****
- Intentionally valuing teachers
- Streamline public comments procedures
- Learning as a team
- Collaborative leadership

The board/interim superintendent team each selected two areas for growth they wished to discuss in greater detail. The topics of most interest were identified as board committees and board meeting efficiency.

The current board committee policies and structure were discussed and included:

- Roles
- Membership
- Commitment
- Process
- Various stakeholders
- 3 current committees – Regular/Standing (Policy & Facilities) and Advisory/Ad Hoc (Finance)
- Tasked to study issue and make recommendations to the BOE
- Consensus vs. voting

After much discussion, the board asked the interim superintendent to enlist the help of the board chair, committee chair, and committee vice-chair to recommend revisions to the policies and procedures to bring back to the full board for review and approval.

These revisions may include:

- Plan for presentation of committee reports at board meetings
 - How reports are listed on the agenda
 - What reports will include
 - summary of committee activities
 - information
 - recommendation
- Written expectations for committees
 - Function
 - Attendance
 - Membership
 - Structure
- Obligation of the district

A discussion on ways to improve board meeting efficiency included:

- Work sessions only for specific topics
- Every meeting will not have a work session
- Executive sessions (if needed) to be held prior to meeting
- Review board calendar for scheduling agenda items
- Move to one agenda per month if possible
- Small, informal, weekly discussions between board members and superintendent
- Review public speaking policy
- Effectively asking questions at meetings
- Work towards efficient, effective meetings

Members of the board/interim superintendent team agreed to develop these practices over time to improve the efficacy and efficiency of JCPS school board meetings.

The last hour of the retreat was focused on identifying at least one practice each member of the board/interim superintendent team could use to improve board governance as well as development of next steps for improvements and professional development. These activities for continuing improvements included:

- Addressing each of the items on the superintendent's list of possible improvements identified during the retreat
- Better utilizing and understanding the board's committee structure and meetings
- Visiting schools with the superintendent
- Including another board member with the chair and superintendent in the development of meeting agendas
- Scheduling meetings of committee chairs, superintendent and board chair
- Learning together, focused on board governance sessions
- Board/interim superintendent book study on the topic of board governance
- Attending the National School Boards Association annual conference as a board team, April 7-9, 2018 in San Antonio, TX

Observations

The engagement and participation of the full board/interim superintendent team over the entire retreat clearly demonstrates the desire by each member to become a more effective, efficient board team for the students of Jefferson County. Board members and the interim superintendent identified many areas of strength in the Jefferson County Public Schools while also acknowledging room for growth and improvement. Board members developed an awareness and better understanding of their governance roles and responsibilities in the leadership for the district.

KSBA encourages the team to continue their collaborative work to improve governance through professional development and to build trust in the district and in the community through communication and leadership. Quarterly training and discussion retreats could provide opportunities for the board/superintendent team to address areas of concern and focus on the governance roles and responsibilities found in high achieving school districts.

It was a pleasure working with the JCPS board/superintendent team and we look forward to other opportunities in the future.

Note: The ***Leadership Roles of the Board*** pocket/purse cards have been mailed to board chair, Chris Brady, for distribution to the board members.

During the discussion of conflicts of interest in the ethics training a clarification was requested on the monetary limit on “gifts” from vendors or potential vendors allowed to school board members. According to information supplied by a KSBA attorney....

Accepting any money or thing of value for the purpose of inducing entry into a contract or the purchase of goods by the board is not allowed.

The Model Procurement Code defines “gratuity” as anything of value over \$50.00.

It is illegal for a vendor to provide money or items of pecuniary value and for public officials to solicit same for the purpose of influencing specific official decision making. In this context “pecuniary benefit” means benefit in the form of money, property, commercial interests or anything else the primary significance of which is economic gain. I do not understand these questions to relate to such actions, but it should be noted that there is no “set” dollar amount that triggers potential application of these laws that are implicated when pecuniary value is conferred and there is specific intent to influence a specific official decision, including purchasing. These laws would not be triggered for example, by a vendor’s mere sponsorship of an educational program that is attended by public officials or by the giving of “prizes” of minimal value available to all attendees

Districts that operate under the Model Procurement Code are subject to KRS 45A.445 and KRS 45A.455. These statutes provide that it is a breach of ethical standards for an employee with purchasing authority (which in my opinion would include board members) to accept “a gratuity” in connection with (among other things) any decision, proceeding, or determination “pertaining to any contract or subcontract and any solicitation or proposal therefor.” “Gratuity”, in turn, is defined as payment or “anything of more than fifty dollars (\$50.00) value....” Application of this statute is fact intensive and may call for some difficult line drawing. Check with board counsel. For example, when is a vendor or potential vendor’s sponsorship of a meal held “in connection” with a contract or proposal? There is no case authority or authority from the Kentucky Attorney General on this precise point. The bottom line is that boards and school officials operating under the procurement code should be sensitive to receiving items of value (including gifts and meals) from current or potential vendors of more than \$50.00 value and would probably be well advised to “just say no” in such circumstances. Of course, board members also need to be sensitive to potential Open Meetings violations which are implicated by any gathering of a quorum where the public’s business is discussed.

Respectfully submitted,
Jean Crowley
KSBA Board Team Development Specialist
July 20, 2017