

Making the Most of Training Opportunities

Gaining knowledge and information from conferences and workshops requires active steps before, during and after the event

The work of a school leader is complex. No one is born with the knowledge and skills to be school board members or administrators. The complicated decisions in regard to policies, superintendent evaluations, student learning, school funding, and legal issues, among others, require patience and knowledge.

Professional development is essential in building one's ability to serve as a school board member or administrator. Professional development is gained through many means. For school board members, one of the most practical and effective means is attending meetings or workshops where school leaders meet and discuss issues in-depth. The upcoming State Education Convention, Jan. 17-19 in Milwaukee, provides many opportunities for school leaders to gain knowledge and share ideas from school board members and administrators from around the state.

However, to get the most out of a conference or workshop, attendees need to be active before, during and after the event to make the most of the information and experience.

■ Before the conference:

- Make an announcement that members from your board will be attending a conference. Make sure to include the purpose and value of the training.
- Review the meeting program and determine which sessions,

discussions, and activities will most benefit your school district.

- Designate at least one member to present a written or verbal report to the school board following the conference.
- If possible, send several members to a conference to attend multiple sessions and get diverse perspectives.

■ During the conference:

Come prepared with specific questions you have for each session or presentation you are attending. If the question isn't answered during the course of the presentation, ask at the end of the session. Or, if that is not an option, send an email (with your question) to the speaker(s) after the session.

- Collect hand-out materials distributed by speakers and share those relevant to your school district.
- Visit with exhibitors or partner businesses or organizations that are exhibiting at the event. Businesses and organizations that work closely with school districts may have products or services (or ideas) that could benefit your district.
- Network with fellow school board members and administrators during the event. You can gain a great deal by networking with colleagues that are facing the same challenges in their districts.

■ After the conference:

- Share what you learned with your school board. Highlight the information and ideas that were shared at the event.
- Explain the benefits for participation in the event or training. School governance is a complex responsibility – training school board members to be effective leaders and decision makers is an educational investment that benefits the district and community.
- You may want to consider preparing a news release that includes the education topics covered at the event, pertinent ideas or information gained, school representatives who attended, and quotes from attendees.

These steps will not only help your school district and students get the most benefit from school leadership professional development opportunities, but it will also help showcase to your community the work that your school district leadership team is doing on behalf of the district. By letting your community know the importance of conferences, and keeping an eye on expenses, board members will stay abreast of the best thinking on school governance issues, avoid mistakes, and be fiscally responsible. ■

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