

A Season of Leadership: **LOOKING AHEAD**

By Dr. Michael T. Adamson, Director of Board Services



*Imagining our futures is smart, even fun. Spending a certain amount of time *thinking* about the future is necessary; however, *planning* for the future is essential.*

We are all curious about the future. The future is where daydreams live and where what was imagined has already come to pass; it is a place where present reality pales against hopeful possibility. But the future is not real in the sense that we can experience it. Thoughts of harnessing H.G. Wells' time machine and being whisked from where we are to where we will be at some future point are only fantasy, the product of overactive imaginations and unproven theory. Still, we are fascinated by the future, we imagine it, we dread it, we anticipate it, but if we are wise, we plan for it.

Imagining our futures is smart, even fun. Spending a certain amount of time thinking about the future is necessary; however, planning for the future is essential. Barring any cataclysmic event, the future will arrive and everyone alive arrives with it, at the same time. It is as natural as when yesterday yielded to today and as today is steadily approaching tomorrow. It is a second-by-second, minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour progression wherein we are challenged by our ability to continually reconcile two known realities and one that is unknown. We have limited knowledge of the past, where our experience resides, and the present, where we are now. However,

we have no experience in the future. Consequently, we anticipate, we guess, and we use the knowledge accumulated from the past to provide a sense of security as we depart the present and step into the future. Thankfully, for the most part, that works.

Experience teaches that many things about the future are predictable and we regularly adjust our predictions based upon what the past and present teach. An objective reflection, from today to yesterday provides a picture anchored in perfect hindsight and affords the means to anticipate what tomorrow holds if it follows a similar pattern to other days we have experienced. Occasionally, our predictions, based on past experiences, do not unfold according to plan and for reasons that fail to follow rhyme or reason. That possibility encourages caution and rethinking plans to possibly uncover some flaw in our prediction logic or to catalog additional information to augment future predictions.

The future is much like a tapestry that is being woven using threads of circumstance, opportunity, desire, and experience. Without a pattern to guide the weaving process, there is minimal confidence that the results will be pleasing. However, if you execute a plan following intentional steps and following the right steps and correct threads, the resulting pattern is more likely to be what you envisioned it would be. Likewise, if you do nothing, any future you have envisioned will likely not materialize as you have imagined. The best insurance for a future that ultimately unfolds as we imagine it can or as we believe it should, is to effectively plan and develop present strategies that encourage a specific future result. The strategies and action plans developed, executed, and completed in the present increase the predictability of the future we want to impact. So, while the future can never be forecast with absolute accuracy, we improve those odds through specific plans that effectively guide our present into the future we have imagined can be.

This type of planning follows a relatively simple process, but it has the potential to impact our futures immensely over a short period of time and immeasurably over a lifetime. However, it requires a certain amount of discipline to effectively usher a dream into reality, but not all dreams are worthy of pursuing; they must be realistic. No matter how much I have dreamed of flying under my own power like a bird, that dream is not realistic. There are sound, logical reasons why my flying like a bird is never going to happen and blindly pursuing that dream is a waste of time and resource that could be applied towards something that is attainable.

I am not suggesting that lofty dreams or goals are not worth pursuing, but they do need to be possible, plus the pursuit and

completion of those goals needs to fulfill some reasonable, future promise that moves us in the direction we want, or know we need, to travel. Our actions should always be measured against their future implications. Without the knowledge that what we are pursuing is purposely leading us in a particular direction and to realize anticipated results, we are largely wasting our time. Goals that are the object of specific action plans may be complex, requiring many steps to complete, or much simpler, requiring minimal plans or actions to complete. Regardless, whether action plans are designed to fully complete a goal, or only to advance one more rung towards completion of a more complex goal, each is important if they have been determined significant to the envisioned future.

This type of work is extremely important for school board members and superintendents. In today's politically charged educational atmosphere and with increasing constraints in every aspect of school leadership and governance, thoughts about the future are often sidelined because of present circumstances and events. Putting out fires has been added to the job description of board members and school administrators to the degree that there



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Contact
Dr. Michael Adamson
Director of Board Services
Indiana School Boards Association
One North Capitol, Suite 1215
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2225
317-639-0330 Ext. 109
madamson@isba-ind.org



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is little time and even less inclination to entertain thoughts about tomorrow. Surviving today takes time enough, and that is the worst kind of despair.

Yet, the realities of today cannot be allowed to overshadow the importance of looking ahead. In fact, without an intentional effort to look beyond the present, there is no way to ensure that the future you prefer will look any different than today. Consequently, if you want your tomorrows to be different, you must first decide what the difference is worth pursuing, then plan how and what must be done differently to pull your vision from the future and into the present.

This year ISBA has been focused on a 70-year milestone, truly a substantial achievement for any organization whose membership is at-will. However, that did not happen accidentally. Great executive directors and oversight Boards very early planned a program of essential services that continue to provide school boards the tools,

guidance, and support upon which members can provide the necessary governance oversight framework adaptable within the culture and climate of the communities they represent.

Milestones are important by marking our movement along a line from where we started to where we are going. Just as each year is a milestone in the history of an organization, every strategic plan has specific milestones that mark key execution points leading to the completion of specific tasks related to a goal or objective. Those milestones help the organization understand its progress to determine whether its current plans are on target to meet specific objectives and contain information that is critical to the allocation of resources, as well as the mitigation of constraints or threats to the overall strategy.

At the close of this year, ISBA's 70th anniversary will be over, but year 71 is steadily advancing and it will demand as much attention as its milestone predecessor, but without all the notoriety. So, while we celebrate milestones for the achievement they represent, in reality, they are just another step in an unyielding, steady march from the present to the future. The present can never be captured beyond the moment and in reflection.

Time waits for no one and we can neither speed the arrival of tomorrow nor delay it. That is why it is so important that we anticipate it. Dreading the future is pointless; it is still approaching at the same pace and will arrive right on schedule, not a second early or late. By taking moments of dread and using them for planning, the future that arrives has an opportunity to emulate our vision and that is preferred over the uncertainty of a future unplanned.

The theme for this year has centered around seasons of leadership; "The Beginning, Developing Deep Roots, Staying Strong, and Looking Ahead." In each issue, we have addressed some basic tenets of leadership. So, whether you are in the winter, spring, summer, or fall of your school board career there are opportunities in each repetitive cycle. This year we eagerly awaited the time when winter's rest would melt to the sounds and smells of spring. Springtime all too quickly transformed into the long days and sweltering heat of summer. Now the familiar colors of fall, with its warm days and cool nights, remind us that nature will soon rest again. The cycle continues and while each year is remarkably similar to the one that precedes it, no two are identical. However, we have learned from the past that, while the future is not certain, we can reasonably forecast what it can be by putting our past knowledge into our present understanding to anticipate the future that approaches. 🌟



2019 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

OCTOBER 28 – NOVEMBER 6

- ISBA Fall Legal Workshops (*Regionally Held*)
- Oct. 28 – Carroll High School
- Oct. 29 – Central Middle International School (Kokomo)
- Oct. 30 – Merrillville High School
- Nov. 4 – Center Grove Education Service Center
- Nov. 6 – Warrick County Administration Center
- Nov. 7 – Scottsburg Middle School

NOVEMBER 5 – NOVEMBER 20

- Regional Meetings (*Various Locations*)
- Nov. 4 Region 4 – The Trails/Tecumseh Room
- Nov. 6 Region 3 – Goeglein's, Kercherval Room
- Nov. 7 Region 7 – The Inn at DePauw
- Nov. 11 Region 1 – Teibel's Restaurant
- Nov. 12 Region 9 – Klubhaus 61
- Nov. 13 Region 10 – The Pines/Evergreen Room
- Nov. 14 Region 5 – Bel Air Events
- Nov. 18 Region 2 – Christo's Banquet Center
- Nov. 19 Region 8 – The Nest
- Nov. 20 Region 6 – Willie and Red's

DECEMBER 11

- ISBA December School Law Seminar
- Ivy Tech Conference Center

For more information on ISBA meetings and locations visit our website at www.isba-ind.org