

Meeting Speed vs. Meeting Efficiency

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It is not uncommon to hear board members complain about the length or brevity of board meetings. Certainly, no one questions that marathon meetings tax board members' attention spans to the limit; after all, the mind can only absorb what the seat can endure! On the opposite side, really short meetings, while not tiring to the mind or body, can seem like a huge waste of time if they are the norm. Still, while both long and short meetings have their place and are not necessarily wrong, neither should represent the standard.

It is easy to confuse speed with efficiency and while getting through an agenda really fast may give the appearance of efficiency, it can also represent complacency, especially if it is obvious that the meeting agenda is just a perfunctory exercise to be endured. Not exercising due-diligence is not only irresponsible, it can breed inefficiencies. Okay, I know you have all heard me say not to belabor agenda items or have unnecessary discussions that only pretend that everyone's mind is not already settled on a position. So, is that advice still sound; is it still a responsible approach in the boardroom? Absolutely!

Having a complete agenda packet available a minimum of two days prior to a regular meeting and having board members who review that packet as soon as it is available helps to ensure that the meeting is not held captive for questions that could easily be answered prior to the meeting. That outcome is dependent upon board members who responsibly ask questions regarding the agenda or administrative recommendations in a timely manner thereby removing any requirement for most discussions to enable board members to settle on a position to approve or disapprove items requiring board action.

Of course, not every agenda item requires board action and each regular meeting agenda typically has a number of these informational agenda items. Reports, presentations, awards, and other items that do not require board action are often part of a regular meeting agenda, especially for boards that only meet once per month. For boards that meet twice per month, these non-action items, coupled with discussion and information-sharing regarding future agenda items requiring board action, often comprise the bulk of the agendas for non-decision-making, working sessions.

Consequently, working sessions are often longer meetings than the regular monthly business meetings for items requiring official board action.

If monthly meetings are almost always over 90 minutes, consider adding a meeting to the schedule or review the agenda and eliminate non-value-added items. If they are consistently under 30 minutes, review the agenda to ensure it contains critical items, not only those requiring board action, but also those that help to ensure that board members are informed and knowledgeable regarding the school community, student achievement, and timely education-related topics.

Being efficient is not about being fast; it is about being thorough. It is about intentionally constructing an agenda that maximizes meeting time by eliminating redundant recitation or deliberation without compromising opportunities for community engagement, board expression and information sharing.

Location of Board Meetings

by Lisa F. Tanselle, ISBA General Counsel (ltanselle@isba-ind.org)

At ISBA, we often advise school board members of the Open Door Law. The intent of the Open Door Law is to ensure that the official action of public agencies, including school boards, is conducted and taken openly so that the citizens of the state are fully informed. Thus, the law focuses on an agency's duty to open its meetings to the public and to advertise the date, time, and place of all of its meetings. Interestingly, the Open Door Law does not impose any restrictions on the location of a public agency's meetings. As long as the location is advertised, the agency fulfills the notice requirements of the law. However, for school boards, other provisions in the education code address where meetings must take place. Those provisions can be found at IC 20-26-4-3. School board members should be aware of these provisions as well.

As a general rule, the law requires all meetings of the school board to be held within the boundaries of the school corporation. There are three exceptions to this requirement, two of

which have very narrow application. The first exception applies in situations where the administrative offices of the school corporation are located outside the boundaries of the school corporation, yet within the county wherein all or part of the school corporation is located. In this situation, the school board may hold its meetings at its administrative offices. The second exception allows a school board to meet outside the boundaries of the school corporation when a statute specifically permits the school board to do so, "as may occur when the meeting is held jointly with another governing body." This exception appears to allow a school board to meet outside of its boundaries when a statute permits the board to meet with another governing body. While ISBA is not aware of a statute that specifically authorizes a joint meeting of governing bodies, this exception would likely apply in cases where two school boards are meeting to discuss possible

consolidation, or when a school board meets with a town board.

The last exception has the greatest application since it is available to all school boards. This exception was added in 2015 and allows a school board to meet outside the boundaries of the school corporation up to two times in a year for training sessions. The law further states that these training sessions may be conducted as executive sessions under the Open Door Law. This is a welcomed addition to the list of exceptions since many school boards like to schedule meetings for the purpose of receiving training in settings other than the school board meeting room. Historically there has been some concern whether this practice was permissible, but now school boards have clear authority to do so. As always, the date, time, and place of the meeting has to be advertised as specified in the Open Door Law, and the location of the meeting can be outside the boundaries of the school corporation.