Making the Case for Virtual Board Governance Technology to Your Board

In 2020 the need for technology was brought into sharp focus by the coronavirus pandemic—not only the need, but the requirement. As professional educators, superintendents rely on technology to manage the ever-increasing landscape of the school business. While using technology to work through board materials more efficiently may be second nature for an administrator, for board members it adds a layer of unfamiliarity to an already busy schedule.

To be successful in bringing board governance technology into the district, there must be buy-in from the board members. To help you make this case, we have outlined three core benefits of adopting virtual board technology.

Change brings with it challenges and opportunities. To overcome the challenges, we have highlighted some features and examples of opportunities to better connect with your community.

"In the first year, our district saved an estimated $25,000 in paper costs; the savings last year are believed to be more than $30,000!"

Sandra Smith
Clerk of the Board of Trustees
Sweetwater Union High School District, CA

Finding Efficiencies and Doing Away with Inefficiencies

- **Cost-effectiveness.** The phrase is often quoted: School boards deal with the two things that matter most to people — their children and their money. Taxpayers are currently wary of spending and are concerned financially in the wake of the economic slowdown due to COVID-19. In a tax-averse society, being good stewards of the dollars entrusted to them is one of their highest priorities. Using the tools embedded in BoardDocs creates tremendous efficiencies in the administration of board meetings.

- **Virtual Meeting Management.** When districts moved to virtual administrative work, many employees that needed to submit items for the agenda were working from home. BoardDocs is the natural tool to circulate information and get approvals from remote locations using the workflow processes designed in the system. This allows the work of the board to continue in any setting. In unpredictable times, this is important to note. School staff can quickly pivot to virtual meetings with the right tools already in place.

- **Time Savings.** Many board members are sensitive to the amount of work that administrators and administrative assistants do. Highlighting the time savings for staff will often help board members open up to the idea of electronic agendas. One task that is so timely for administrative staff is compiling meeting minutes. Using electronic voting in BoardDocs Pro allows the system to collect the data. Staff members give light edits to fit the local community format, and link to the next meeting's agenda, taking a task that took days and sometimes weeks down to a couple of hours. Automated minutes are the time-saver that boards have needed for years. A quick scan of time spent on this task can be shared with board members to help them understand the efficiencies of automation.

"Thank you, BoardDocs, for giving me my weekends back."

Administrative Assistant
California school district

Action Items

☐ Estimate the labor and material costs associated with board meeting preparation

☐ Catalog the different tools and processes used for meeting management. Also note whether all participants are using the same tools/processes.

☐ Document the average time spent preparing for meetings and compiling minutes.

Protecting Sensitive Information

- **Protecting Against Phishing Attacks.** The recent security breach at Twitter exposed the fact that even the most tech-savvy users are susceptible to attacks. The breach stemmed from what is called a phishing attack. People get an email that looks to be legitimate and they reply with data like passwords allowing the hacker access to the system. Budget cuts are depriving school districts of the financial resources to invest in cyberdefense. Small IT departments are currently stretched supporting teachers and students in virtual learning formats Cyberattacks on local government entities—both education and municipal—are on the rise, tripling in 2019. These organizations are considered "low hanging fruit" to hackers. Even if the hacker gets a small ransom, they can add up quickly. Cities and school districts often pay to restore services quickly. Simply put, email and free repositories are not secure formats for what can be sensitive data.

- **Paper is Not Safer.** Board members that use devices need to be aware that the transmission of sensitive data is open to attack. Before they counter with paper being safer, they need to understand that copiers have hard drives or chips filled with data of every image processed through the machine; paper is a form of electronic copy. A south Texas school district recently had to notify all parents of a breach after copiers were sold with student data on them. Conveying information via email or in a document repository like Google Docs may be a slight improvement but is still not secure. With BoardDocs, all data is stored on secure, encrypted servers. Board members access their password-protected accounts without the information having to be transferred.

- **Complying with FRPA.** The COVID era has brought even more security risks. All students are subject to FRPA (Family Rights and Privacy Act) and districts must keep student data secure. This includes everything from disciplinary records to free and reduced lunch applications to the diagnosis of a virus. Weigh this with the board needing to be apprised of the health risks in their district and it makes a situation rife with opportunities for a breach. Staff and board members should never discuss sensitive information in any electronic format that is not secure. Leaving student records at risk could open the district up to potential legal liability. No district wants to make headlines by accidentally releasing sensitive data.

> "It's all online, it is secure, it is one of the best e-governance systems that I have seen. And I have worked with some others. And BoardDocs really streamlines it for us."

Nancy Conover
Senior Board Specialist
Orange County Public Schools

Action Items

☐ Make a list of any personal emails or devices being used to conduct board business.

☐ Determine if/how paper documents are still being used and if files are stored in any cloud storage platforms.

☐ Document how sensitive data is protected in current processes.

Improving Access and Community Engagement

- **Keeping the Public Informed.** Community access and engagement is more important than ever. Young parents are tech-savvy and digitally driven. Keeping parents and community members informed and involved is of utmost importance to both the district and the board members. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) guarantees taxpayers and community members access to data and information as long as it does not infringe on a student or staff member's privacy. A member of the public can make a FOIA request at any time. Because of the potential expense to the district in researching and copying documents, legislators have allowed districts to charge reasonable fees for these searches. The fees often do not make up for the staff time spent. Conversely, there is no fee reasonable enough to make up for the trust that is lost, and the frustration mounted by community members when they are forced to file requests and pay for the information.

- **Fostering Trust Among the Community.** Public trust is the foundation of a well-functioning school district. In times of uncertainty, this is paramount. The community wants to look to the school district with confidence. Having a central location to be the definitive source of up to date, accurate information regarding the district's decisions helps parents feel their children are being taken care of. Using the graded security fields ensures that board members can quickly see a single source of information and know immediately what is public information and what should be kept confidential. The automatic email feature notifies board members when an important update is featured.

> "During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been more relevant than ever to meet the governance needs of schools using technology while remaining physically distant yet, systematically operational. BoardDocs has allowed us to remain publicly transparent and accessible to all of our stakeholders through this process utilizing cutting edge technology."

Tricia Winters
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent
Cottonwood Oak Creek
School District #6

Action Items

☐ Determine the average number of FOIA requests received per year and fees collected vs costs incurred.

☐ Calculate the average time spent researching and responding to FOIA requests.

☐ Evaluate how information is currently shared with the public and the board, and how access permissions are controlled including the number of different modes used (i.e. text, email, doc) to access and find information.

Remote School Board Meeting Management Software Adaptable to Your Needs

BoardDocs provides school districts a platform to exercise transparency and navigate remote collaboration effectively. Live-stream meetings, manage and update policies, vote securely, share agendas and documents with the community, and establish secure fields to protect confidential information. BoardDocs also provides a document storage area for organizing reference materials such as COVID-19 resources and superintendent updates. Schedule a demo today.
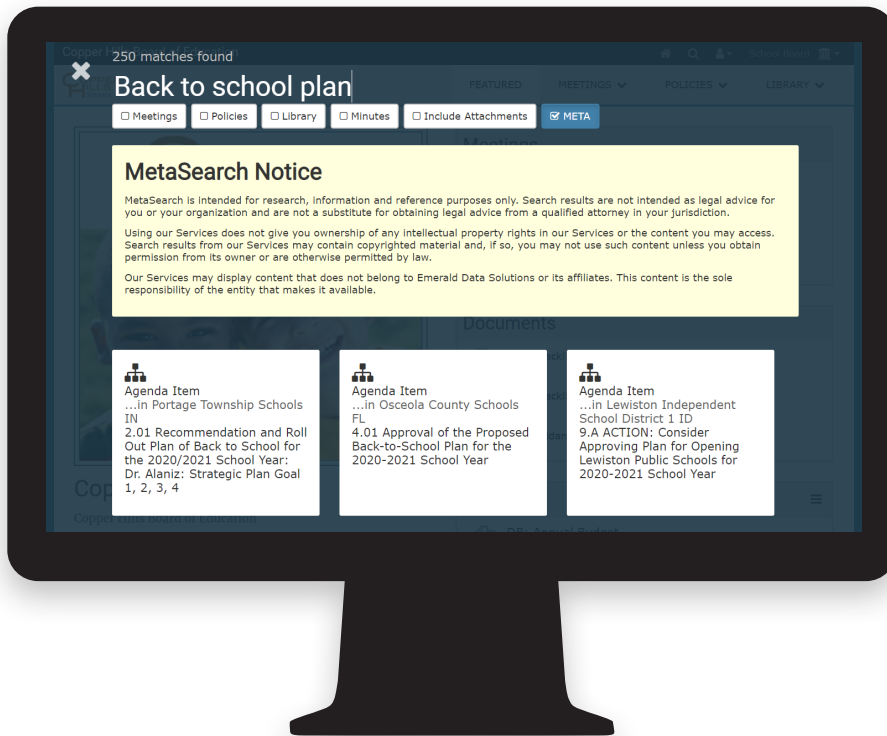
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Community by Diligent is the next generation of the industry leading solutions, BoardDocs & iCompass, trusted tools used by over 4,000 public governing bodies. The intuitive, easy-to-use paperless meeting software supports public leaders and board members to streamline the way they build agendas, distribute materials to the board, and communicate with constituents and before, during, and after public meetings - whether they are in person or virtual.

In a time of enhanced risk and disruption, make sure your board has the right information to ask the right questions. Schedule a BoardDocs demo today.

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