

To the Fellow Members of the Board of Trustees, Superintendent, Faculty, Staff, and Citizens of Minidoka County,

The Idaho School Board Association held its annual convention in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, from November 12 to 14, 2025. As Trustee representing Minidoka County Joint School District No. 331, I had the privilege of attending this distinguished event, during which I participated in a variety of informative sessions and collaborative working luncheons with notable guest speakers.

Session One: Foundations of School Law for Board Members

During Session One, I participated in the “Foundations of School Law for Board Members” workshop, presented by Ann Ritter, a consultant with the Idaho School Board Association. This essential session was designed to give new school board members a thorough understanding of the legal framework and governance responsibilities that come with their roles.

The workshop guided participants through the legal obligations set forth by the Idaho Code and federal regulations. Key areas of focus included open meeting statutes, student rights, staff contracts, and significant compliance issues such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Title IX. These topics provided a solid foundation for understanding the legal landscape in which school boards operate.

A major takeaway from the session was the clarification that the primary responsibility of school board members is governance. The workshop stressed the importance of fostering strong, effective working relationships between the board and the superintendent. This relationship is central to the successful functioning of a school district.

Ann Ritter further explained the roles of the Idaho Administrative Procedures Act (IDAPA), the State Board of Education, and the State Department of Education in establishing educational rules. These rules must receive approval from the legislature before they become law. For example, IDAPA 08.01 and 08.02 covers registration requirements for post-secondary institutions and sets standards related to personnel, accreditation, and professional development. IDAPA 08.03 outlines the graduation requirements for students in Idaho.

At the school board level, local control covers the development of policies, procedures, and labor contracts. The session also addressed the importance of transparency in board operations and detailed the specific duties of a board clerk, as outlined in Idaho Code 33-508.

Session Two: How School Boards Influence Student Success

During Session Two, I participated in a 45-minute introductory workshop led by Phil Gore from the Idaho School Board Association. This session was designed to help new board members understand their vital role in promoting student achievement across the district. The workshop highlighted how the establishment of high expectations, a unified vision, clear goals, and data-driven decision-making are all instrumental in shaping opportunities and fostering a culture centered on student success.

The course provided practical approaches for engaging stakeholders and enhancing the positive influence of the board. A key emphasis was placed on the importance of board members learning together as a cohesive team, especially in collaboration with the superintendent. It was noted that the school board sets the tone for the district's culture, which directly impacts the superintendent, staff, and students. When a school board operates effectively, it strengthens the overall district and contributes to improved student outcomes.

Board members are encouraged to model the behaviors they expect from teachers and students. The session pointed out that distractions caused by unnecessary drama can divert attention from the goal of student achievement. Therefore, maintaining focus and modeling constructive behavior are critical for success.

The workshop centered on five essential governance questions that should guide board discussions and decisions:

- How are students performing?
- What measures are used to evaluate their progress?
- Which strategies are being employed to improve outcomes?
- How is success defined?
- How will progress toward that success be assessed?

By consistently focusing on these fundamental questions, school boards can help ensure ongoing improvement in student achievement throughout the district.

Session Three: School Finance Fundamentals for Board Members

Session three was led by Chris James from the Cassia County School District (No. 151) and focused on the foundational aspects of school finance for board members. This session highlighted the critical importance of understanding school finance as a key element of

effective school board leadership. New board members were introduced to the principal components of public-school funding in Idaho, gaining valuable knowledge to help guide their responsibilities.

Legal Responsibilities and Financial Oversight

Attendees explored their legal obligations and the importance of financial oversight, emphasizing the role school board members play in ensuring responsible management of educational funds. The session provided a clear explanation of Idaho's funding formula, detailing how resources are allocated to school districts.

Budget Structures and Local Levies

The presentation offered clarification on local levies, budget structures, and financial reports, all tailored for individuals without accounting backgrounds. This approach was intended to build confidence among new board members in their fiscal decision-making, reinforcing the necessity of transparency and public trust in the financial processes of school districts.

Attendance Figures and Funding Concerns

One of the notable takeaways involved the significance of attendance figures and the reasoning behind their current structuring. The session addressed widespread misinformation about school performance and Idaho's school funding, noting that while the state's funding formula is generally sound, the most pressing issue is the insufficient allocation of resources. An analogy was used to illustrate the disparity: Idaho's share of educational funding is a smaller fraction compared to states like California, highlighting the differences in available funds.

Clarification of Financial Terms and Acronyms

Additionally, the session clarified various definitions and acronyms relevant to school finance, such as MNO (Maintenance Operator), SBA (Salary-Based Appointment), and ADA (Average Daily Attendance), correcting common misconceptions about these terms. This information was essential in helping board members accurately interpret financial documents and reports.

Overall, the session was designed to strengthen board members' confidence in their fiscal responsibilities and underscore their essential role in promoting transparency and maintaining public trust within the school system.

Session Four: "What I Know Now That I Wish I Knew Then"

Session four, titled "What I Know Now That I Wish I Knew Then," was facilitated by Jason Lloyd of the Idaho School Board Association, along with guest speakers from various school districts. This session took the form of a peer discussion, giving experienced board members the opportunity to share their insights and lessons learned with newer members. The purpose was

to help individuals like me become more effective leaders by drawing on the collective wisdom and experiences of those who have served longer.

One of the primary topics addressed during the discussion was the common misconception that Idaho schools are failing. In contrast to this belief, it was noted that Idaho performs well in academics at the national level. Specifically, Idaho's middle schools are ranked seventh in reading, and students across grades K-12 have earned top ten placements in several subjects. This information provides valuable context and reassurance regarding the state's educational performance.

For me, the most significant takeaway from this session was the importance of connecting with experienced board members and fostering relationships within my own board. Building these connections enables new members to gain practical guidance and perspective, which is essential for effective leadership and governance.

Session five Board and Superintendent Partnerships: Building Strong Governance Relationships

Establishing Effective Partnerships

Session five centered on the critical relationship between school boards and district leadership, specifically charter administrators or superintendents. Led by Luke Schroder from Cambridge School District 441, the session highlighted that robust connections between board members and administrators are essential for effective governance and improved student achievement.

Roles and Relationship Dynamics

A team consisting of a superintendent and board members shared practical strategies for building trust, clarifying roles, and fostering clear communication. To illustrate these dynamics, the presenters used the analogy of a ship: the board acts as the compass guiding direction, the superintendent is the engine driving progress, and the board clerk serves as the bridge connecting both. Examples were provided to demonstrate the importance of seating arrangements at meetings; specifically, the superintendent should not sit directly beside the board chair to avoid the appearance of undue influence. Instead, physical separation—by one or two seats or at opposite ends of the table, with the chair positioned centrally—was recommended.

Principles for Healthy Partnerships

Presenters, primarily millennials and Gen Xers, emphasized that trust, respect, communication, and a unified focus are fundamental to successful collaboration among the school board, superintendent, and board clerk. Regular check-ins were advocated as a strategy to maintain these qualities, with many districts sending weekly email updates, typically on Fridays or Sundays, to keep board members informed about district events that happened throughout the previous week. Utilizing email for these updates was recommended to maintain transparency and avoid the potential for text messages to be subpoenaed in open meeting scenarios.

Communication and Meeting Preparation

Consistent weekly communication supports open dialogue and reinforces mutual goals between board members and superintendents. The session also underscored the importance of well-organized meeting agendas. Agendas should be prepared collaboratively ahead of time, with all topics clearly understood prior to the meeting. Board members were encouraged to direct questions to the superintendent before meetings, rather than during them, to prevent surprises and allow for thoughtful, transparent responses.

Maintaining Professional Boundaries

Confidentiality and avoiding micromanagement were identified as critical practices. Over-involvement by board members can erode trust, disrupt agendas, hinder processes, and diminish board effectiveness. As a best practice, finalizing and discussing the meeting agenda one week prior to the official session was recommended to ensure smooth operations and constructive discussions.

Session Six: Board Meeting Best Practices—No Drama, No Surprises

Session six, titled “No Drama, No Surprise Board Meeting Best Practices,” was facilitated by mediator Jason Lloyd from the Idaho School Board Association, Michelle Lucas of Twin Falls School District #411, Renee Johnson from Pocatello Chubbuck School District #025, and Marina Southwick from Coeur d’Alene School District #271. The session aimed to provide practical guidance for new trustees, focusing on effective participation and conduct during board meetings.

Essential Practices for New Board Members

A panel of experienced board clerks led new trustees through the core elements of successful board meetings. Topics included understanding how agendas are built, making motions,

participating in discussions, and staying on track—all within the framework of Idaho Open Meeting Law. The session was highly interactive, with participants encouraged to ask questions and engage in conversation. Attendees received a variety of tips and tools to boost their confidence and competence at the board table.

Meeting Preparation and Agenda Management

A major emphasis was placed on avoiding surprises during school board meetings. If all board members have not reviewed and understood the agenda items before the meeting, it is recommended to table those topics until everyone is prepared. New board members were advised to stay focused, avoid going off-topic, and help keep the agenda progressing smoothly. Clear and audible speech in public meetings was stressed, as was the avoidance of confusing language or “word salads.”

Active engagement was encouraged from the outset—new members should not hesitate to ask questions or contribute to discussions and should strive for transparency while strictly adhering to meeting laws. Preparation is key: reviewing the agenda ahead of time and raising questions with the superintendent one to two days prior to the meeting allows board clerks sufficient time (typically 48 hours) to implement necessary changes and ensure legal compliance.

Handling Routine and Special Business Items

Routine operational items, such as heat, water, and power bills, can be grouped and approved with a single motion, followed by a second and a collective vote. For example, a board member might move to approve items A through H as general business, streamlining the process. Questions about these items should be directed at the Superintendent or his board clerk. Workshops are recommended for addressing agenda topics in advance, ensuring that all inquiries are resolved prior to the official meeting.

Public Comment Procedures

The session discussed the importance of clear rules for public comments. These should be posted, announced, or read aloud during the meeting, specifying time limits and guidelines for participation. It is essential that both the board chair and members comply with these rules. For staff or public comments, the recommended protocol is for the superintendent to respond first, followed by the board chair, vice chair, and then other board members. This ensures everyone has an opportunity to comment before anyone speaks a second time.

Ordinary business should be prioritized during meetings, while special topics—such as dress code policy—are better addressed in separate, special meetings. Board members wishing to add items to the agenda should discuss the topic with the chair and then formally request inclusion with the clerk or superintendent. If the chair and Superintendent decline, two board

members can agree to have the item placed on the agenda, maintaining compliance with open meeting laws.

Making Motions and Record Keeping

Motions must be articulated clearly and concisely, as the clerk is responsible for recording the exact wording verbatim in the meeting notes. Trustees were reminded never to text or use cell phones during meetings, nor to pass notes to fellow board members or visibly take notes, as these could be subpoenaed under open meeting law. Such practices can create suspicion of secret discussions and undermine public trust. Finally, the importance of allowing every trustee to speak before anyone comments a second time was emphasized, supporting inclusivity and transparency in board deliberations.

Session Participation and Keynote Highlights

Engaging in all six sessions proved to be an invaluable educational experience. Each session provided practical insights and guidance, equipping participants with essential tools and strategies for effective board involvement. The interactive format and expert-led discussions contributed significantly to a deeper understanding of board operations and best practices.

Additionally, the two lunch sessions were particularly noteworthy for featuring keynote speeches and welcoming several distinguished guests. Among those in attendance were Governor Brad Little and Debbie Critchfield, whose presence underscored the importance of the event. These keynote speakers further enrich the learning environment, offering diverse perspectives and fostering a greater appreciation for the complexities of educational leadership.

Dillon Cooper's Keynote: Lessons on Cultural Understanding

During his keynote, Dillon Cooper shared a memorable story from his childhood growing up in the Yellowstone area. He recalled how he and others would often make fun of busloads of Chinese tourists who, unfamiliar with the American-style toilets found around the Tetons, unintentionally broke them. At the time, Dillon and his peers questioned how people could be so unaware of how to use a toilet properly.

Later in life, Dillon traveled to China for several months. There, he discovered that the standard way to use a toilet was different: people would stand on them, which was perfectly normal and accepted in their culture. This revelation made Dillon realize that what he had previously judged as ignorance was, in fact, simply a difference in cultural norms and practices. He

recognized that his earlier assumptions were misguided, and he was the one lacking understanding.

Dillon's experience served as a powerful reminder about the importance of listening and seeking to understand the perspectives and practices of others. Rather than making snap judgments or jumping to conclusions—especially when faced with something unfamiliar or seemingly odd—it is essential to consider the underlying reasons and cultural backgrounds that shape people's behaviors. His story encouraged the audience to approach disagreements or misunderstandings with empathy and a willingness to understand, rather than react impulsively or dismissively.

Tim Gartchau's Keynote: Lessons from the Seattel Washington Marathon

On the second day, the featured speaker was Tim Garchow, who delivered a talk centered around the theme of perseverance: "Keeping Our Eyes on the Horizon and One Foot in Front of Another." Garchow began with a humorous personal anecdote about his efforts to impress his father-in-law. He shared that he only ran once a year, specifically when his father-in-law visited, as a way to fit in and connect. This yearly ritual unexpectedly led to him participating in the Seattle marathon, a challenge involving a 23-mile run.

Garchow recounted that, in an effort to further ingratiate himself, he volunteered to run the marathon on behalf of one of his father-in-law's brothers who couldn't attend. At the time, Garchow was in poor physical condition, smoking a pack of cigarettes daily and lacking regular exercise. Within the first three miles, he quickly realized the severity of his situation, acknowledging that he was out of shape and unprepared for the physical demands of the marathon.

Despite these challenges, Garchow focused on the simple mantra: keep his eyes on the horizon and take one step at a time. He managed to finish the race, although the experience left him physically drained—his shirt was soiled due to the typical effects of long-distance running, and he required hospitalization for several days because of severe dehydration.

Throughout the marathon, Garchow learned important lessons by observing other runners. For instance, at the third mile marker, he noted that others were drinking water, so he joined in and began hydrating himself. By the ninth mile, he saw runners using a goo-like substance for energy, tried it himself, and initially felt revitalized. His enthusiasm led him to consume several more packets, but by the twelfth mile, he discovered that too much sugar and energy gel could

have negative effects. While he didn't explicitly admit to any embarrassing incidents, he did acknowledge that the goo adversely affected him in several ways.

The overarching lesson Garchow imparted was the importance of learning as you go and adapting to new circumstances. Throughout the race, he discovered what he needed to do to keep moving forward and ultimately finish. His story, both entertaining and insightful, underscored the value of steady persistence and focusing on the end goal, regardless of the obstacles encountered.

Reflections on Professional Development

The opportunity to attend this convention proved to be an invaluable experience for my professional growth and development. The experience was highly beneficial, the sessions and keynote presentations offered a wealth of insights and perspectives, significantly enriching my understanding of key issues within our field. The benefits gained from participating were significant, and I look forward with enthusiasm to being involved in upcoming ISBA Annual Conventions.

Respectfully submitted,

Lendon Moss

Zone 1 Trustee