



## Seven signs of highly effective school board members

BY KATHRYN BLUMSACK AND TERRY MCCABE

**C**ongratulations! You're now a member of the Board of Education. If you're like most new board members, you've worked hard to reach this point. You've listened to your community, and come to understand its values and concerns. Above all, you've embraced the transformative power of a great board to improve public education. Local control of education through elected school boards is a deeply held American political tradition. School boards may be small and local, but they represent perhaps the most important daily civic commitment we as citizens make to our communities, our children, and our future.

As a new board member, you bring sharp questions, innovative ideas, and fresh energy. You'll look at established routines and policies with new eyes, you'll challenge old assumptions, and you'll have the opportunity to share your perspective with your fellow board members. At the same time, you'll learn how to make a positive difference in the work of the board, and how to contribute most effectively to lasting change. We want you to be the most effective possible advocate for your community's educational vision and values. To help you succeed, we're going to share with you the seven practices of highly effective boards.

### 1. Going solo's a no-no

You were elected to your board as an individual. You've got issues that are priorities for you. And you'll get a lot of individual attention early on from friends, school employees, and community members who want you to tackle particular problems. The early temptation will be to say "yes" and use your power to fix things.

Except you won't have any power to use — not as an individual, at least. As a school board member, you have no individual legal authority to fix problems or decide issues. One of the wisest things you can do is to help others understand that you can only get your work done as part of a team. We're not saying you can't try to take the lead on a particular issue, or that you have to stay silent — not at all. In fact, the more you communicate and share with your fellow board members, the more likely you'll be able to gain support for your priorities and ideas.

Look at the long term: Your success as a board member is inextricably tied to the success of your board. You will be judged by what it accomplishes, not by what you as an individual tried to accomplish. In all the years (decades!) we've worked with school boards, we've never

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Foster High School in Tukwila, one of the oldest districts in Washington, is celebrating 100 years.

## It's always a great day to be a bulldog

**F**oster High School is the most diverse school in the nation. Located in Tukwila, the go-to spot for refugee-resettlement by the International Rescue Committee, it's no wonder that there are more than 45 different dialects spoken in the school.

Principal Pat Larsen explained to school board members on the Innovative Schools Tour in September that many of the school's strengths are also their challenges.

The cultural mash-up at Foster is highly celebrated, but the large transient population, language barriers, and high rate of poverty that go along with it, create unique challenges

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## Critical education issues tackled at January event

There is still time to register for the annual Legislative Conference/Day on the Hill January 26-27, 2014 to make your voice heard on critical education issues. Register by January 17 for \$195 or \$250 after the 17th.

The event is designed to bring legislators and the executive branch together with school directors, superintendents, finance officials and other school district leaders to discuss K-12 priorities.

The Legislative Conference kicks off on January 26th at 1:00 p.m. with four hours of presentations and discussions on the hottest topics in education. Speakers include Governor Jay Inslee (invited), State Superintendent Randy Dorn, an education funding panel, emerging issues session, and hot topics presented by WSSDA and WASA governmental relations staff.

Monday is our Day on the Hill, when you can join your education colleagues and meet with legislators on our 2014 priorities. This year we are seeking funding for two professional development days, along with holding firm on basic education investments.

Sunday's events are at the Olympia Red Lion. Day on the Hill meetings will mainly take place on the Capital campus.

The 2014 Legislative Conference is proudly sponsored by WSSDA, WASA and WASBO.



## Six things you should expect in 2014

BY HANNAH GBENRO

I read an article in Forbes today that discussed what we should expect from business leaders in 2014. This made me think about what we should expect from educational leaders in 2014. Many of the overarching ideas align with the Forbes article, and yet the reasoning behind their application to ed leaders differs a bit.

### 1. An identity you can count on

Expect we know who we are as leaders, our core values, and our influences. We should be able to look in the mirror every day and ask (+ answer):

- What do you believe?
- Why do you believe that?
- What's the most recent evidence that shows you believe these things?

### 2. Sense of urgency

For educational leaders, lives of kids and families are at stake each day and we take this seriously. The "market" in which many of us exist is shifting. For example, in Washington State we're implementing Federal, State, and local initiatives related to teacher/principal evaluation, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), standards-based instruction/assessment/grading/curriculum, cultural competency, etc. On top of that, charter schools are becoming a reality. Our traditionally red ocean approaches to the educational arena are quickly shifting to be redefined within a blue ocean state. In 2014, we will strive to keep up with these changes, while forging ahead with a sense of urgency that leads to making a difference for each student.

### 3. Use the best of what's around

Educational leaders in 2014 will foster 21st century skills within our schools/districts/teams and break down human barriers for educators/leaders/students/families to use technology in classrooms, communication, collaboration, national/global connections, etc. The 21st century is nearly 13% complete. Almost all Pk-8 students have grown up in the 21st century. In light of this reality, educational leaders in 2014 will establish flexible systems within which innovation and creativity can flourish. We will invite innovative ideas to be shared so we can

help negotiate terms that will allow for the fruition of such ideas.

### 4. Increased collaboration

Collaboration is recognizing that leadership success comes most to those who are surrounded by people who want their success to continue (Llopis, 2013). Expect educational leaders to leverage Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) online and ongoing communication with fellow association members. It used to be we might connect with fellow leaders at meetings and annual conferences. Now, we're able to connect via tools like Twitter, Google Hangouts, and Facebook on a regular basis. I love that associations, like ASCD, are supporting this! They've coordinated monthly Hangouts for Emerging Leaders (and alumnus). Leaders who are connected will be more supported and inspired on a regular basis during 2014.

### 5. In-depth understanding of OD

Understanding and applying Organization Development (OD) best practices is a necessity in today's shifting landscape of education. Change will not be forever, but it is expected to be constant for the foreseeable future (Anderson, 2012). You can expect educational leaders in 2014 to hear this statement then draw on OD knowledge and experiences to collaboratively lead a SWOT analysis that informs work, develop communication plans, assign project managers, mentor colleagues in regard to OD, and utilize progress monitoring tools (like dashboards). You can expect us to ask tough questions that challenge traditional thinking about educational systems and lend themselves to increased clarity in the long run.

### 6. Communication

For real estate, the important piece is location, location, location. In leadership, that translates to communication, communication, communication! This rings true as we move into 2014. You can expect educational leaders to be increasingly attentive to both internal and external communication strategies, leveraging many 21st century tools.

Hannah Gbenro of Federal Way Public Schools is an ASCD Emerging Leader.



PRESIDENT  
**Mari Taylor**

## The great puzzle of public education

**F**ourteen years ago, as a newly elected board member attending my first WSSDA Annual Conference, my head was spinning with all I had to learn. As we listened to WSSDA President Judy Janes speak, my superintendent leaned over to suggest that one day I would take on a leadership position in WSSDA.

Of course I thought he was deluded. I was pretty sure I was in the right place on my local board. I could have never imagined the meaningful role boardsmanship would take on for me.

Much to my surprise, Joe saw something in me that I didn't. As green as I was, he saw that I was a piece of the puzzle that he and many others had been working on for years — discovering how we can support all children to find their success through public education.

This isn't an easy puzzle and it has many pieces.

Public schools are doing amazing work in educating children, engaging families and creating a better future for all of us. But it will take broader partnerships to tackle many of the out-of-school challenges our children face.

Fifty years into the "War on Poverty", 22% of America's children are still living in poverty — poverty that is overwhelmingly correlated with student achievement. Broad research confirms that underperformance is not limited to children at the bottom of the economic ladder. Children across the spectrum are underperforming aligned with their family income level, to

the extent that nearly 50% of our nation's 5 year olds reach kindergarten lacking the skills they need to succeed. And on the other end, failure to do well in school inevitably leads to a much greater chance of being poor.

Quality teachers and a solid curriculum are critical components of student success. However, if we focus only on those areas, we can make only limited gains. Research reveals that more than 80% of differences in student achievement can be explained by the conditions of children's homes and communities.

As school directors, we have an obligation to acknowledge the impact of poverty and inequity and to work on solutions than go beyond the school yard.

The good news is we have many pieces to this puzzle firmly in place. We are beginning to understand brain development and the importance of quality early learning. We are partnering with social services and law enforcement. We are examining discipline practices, physical and mental health access, and meaningful family and community engagement. We are also pursuing partnerships that allow us to focus on the work of student achievement.

The prognosis for public education is hopeful. Each of you is in the right place at the right time to make a difference. Thank you for committing your time, talents and skills to contribute solutions to this vital puzzle that is public education.

## Jonelle Adams retires from WSSDA

**D**r. Jonelle Adams is retiring in January after three and one-half years as Executive Director of the Washington State School Directors' Association.

Jonelle has spent more than 35 years working in education in Washington. That experience ranged from teaching in elementary school to leadership positions in the private and non-profit sectors.

Some of the highlights of her time at WSSDA include:

- Advancement of an association strategic plan that is monitored throughout the year and reviewed by the WSSDA Board of Directors at each of their meetings.
- Raising the profile of WSSDA as a key partner in statewide educational leadership and governance.
- Passage of WSSDA initiated legislation.
- Exceptional attendance and reviews of its annual and legislative conferences.
- Revamping of the association's web and social media presence.

"On behalf of the board, I would like to thank Dr. Adams for her tremendous energy during the past few years," said Mari Taylor, WSSDA President. "The education world has been in a state of great change and Jonelle helped us focus our conversation with policy makers on the issues that matter most to our kids and schools."

Dr. Adams plans to continue to be active in education issues and is looking forward to consulting on several new projects.







**Heidi Maynard**  
DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND LEGAL SERVICES

# Court finds teacher waived his right to an administrative hearing in termination appeal

*McLain v. Kent School District., No. 415, App.*

The Court of Appeals for Division I has reversed and vacated an order by a King County Superior Court judge allowing a teacher to pursue an administrative hearing in the appeal of his non-renewal.

The opinion is notable for two reasons. First, it is published and may be cited in future cases — a rarity among recent school law cases. Second, it concludes that a teacher with a legal right to an administrative hearing after termination waives that right by failing to meet applicable statutory deadlines and requirements.

The undisputed facts in this case paint a picture of twenty-one months of the teacher's dithering, delay, failure to respond and uncertain pro se status. This turned what should have been one very simple conversation with the district's attorney into an unnecessary ordeal. The opinion painstakingly documents the entire sequence of events, including transcribed voicemails the district's attorney left for the teacher in an attempt to move the case forward. The court's apparent impression of these events: Enough is enough.

In February, 2010, the district superintendent notified McLain that his lack of improvement during his probationary period had established probable cause to non-renew his teaching contract for the 2010-11 school year. The notice stated McLain must contact the district within 10 days to contest the decision in an administrative hearing.

On March 1, a Washington Education Association (WEA) attorney sent a

letter to the district appealing McLain's non-renewal. The WEA attorney and the district's attorney discussed the selection of possible hearing officers. At The WEA attorney's request, the district provided him with 340 pages of documentation on the decision to non-renew.

In June, the WEA attorney informed the district that he no longer represented McLain in the appeal. On July 12, he provided the district with a notice of his withdrawal and instructed the district to contact McLain directly. The district's attorney did so the following day, notifying McLain that he must contact his office within 10 days to select a hearing officer.

On July 27, McLain notified the district that he intended to pursue the appeal and had secured his own attorney and that he intended to sue the district for wrongful termination and discrimination. The district's attorney requested that McLain have his attorney contact him as soon as possible.

On August 17, the district received a public records request from an attorney representing McLain. The district's attorney received a letter two days later from McLain's attorney stating that the attorney was only representing McLain on the public records request, not the termination appeal. The district's attorney then wrote to McLain regarding the termination appeal and requested yet again that he phone him to discuss selecting a hearing officer.

McLain did not respond or contact the

district during the entire 2010-11 school year. In November 2011, another attorney representing McLain contacted the district to pursue an administrative appeal of the decision not to renew. The district took the position that any appeal had by now been waived.

RCW 28A.405.310 requires that within 15 days of receipt of a request for an administrative hearing, the district and the teacher must each designate "a nominee" to jointly agree to a hearing officer. If the nominees fail to agree on a hearing officer, either party may petition the presiding judge of superior court to appoint one.

McLain filed in Superior Court to have a hearing officer appointed. His new attorney argued that his former WEA attorney was McLain's nominee and that he and the district's attorney, as nominees, had been "unable to agree on a hearing officer to conduct the hearing as required by statute." Therefore, he asserted, one should be appointed by the court.

Writing for the court, Hon. Ann Schindler found no definition for "fail to agree" in statute, so she turned to Webster's Dictionary for its ordinary meaning. The court deduced that the district's attorney and McLain did not "fail to agree." The court held that McLain waived his right to pursue the administrative appeal by failing to comply with the mandatory statutory requirements and deadlines.

Charles W. Lind of Patterson, Buchanan, Fobes & Leitch represented the District. Douglas Michael Wartelle of Cogdill Nichols Rein represented McLain.

that other districts don't have. Larsen does not belabor these issues and is quick to point out the positives. "Teachers who really want to make a difference are drawn to Foster," she said.

About 500 refugees are placed in Tukwila every year. Once they've adjusted to life in the United States, many move on. It's not uncommon for teachers to begin the year with one class and end the year with an entirely different set of students.

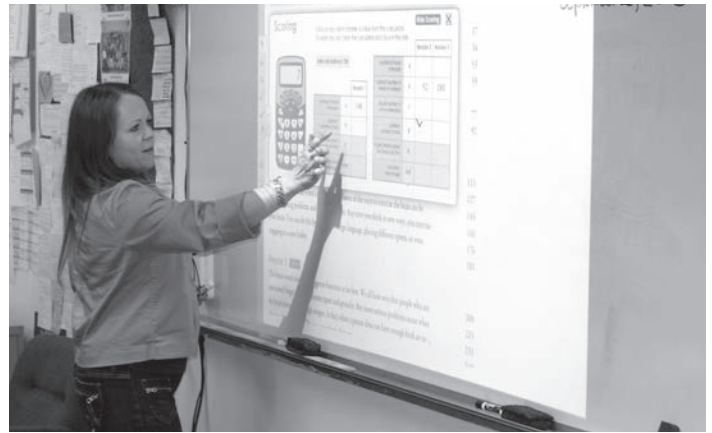
On the flip-side, there are many longtime residents of Tukwila. Larsen's children are fourth-generation Bulldogs, as are many others who have embraced the increasing diversity.

Students born as far away as Kenya, Mexico, Nepal and Bosnia spoke of the great support system at the school. Cultural clubs, school spirit events, sports and mentoring programs all help students make the transition from war-torn countries a little easier.

"Sometimes just saying hello to someone who doesn't speak English is enough to make them feel welcome," explained one student when asked how they communicate in spite of many language barriers.

Culture is also a big focus of classroom curriculum. One recent project, 'culture boxes', had students gather memorabilia to answer the question, "who am I, and where have I been?" This proved to be an easy task for students born in foreign countries, but those born and raised in and around Tukwila had a hard time recognizing their heritage. It was a good opportunity for American-born students to discover their ancestry.

This year Foster High is celebrating its 100th year — one of the



Foster High School classrooms are equipped with SMART Boards. The interactive whiteboards accept touch input from a finger, pen or other similar object. Students are also encouraged to bring their own electronic devices to enhance learning in the classroom.

oldest districts in the state. Relocated from its original spot two times, the current school was built in 1992. As part of the new structure, the Performing Arts Center is home to many community events that cultivate cultural diversity and acceptance. A Somali culture night, Bosnian dance event and performance by the Chinese Opera keep the doors open well beyond traditional school hours.

"Coming to Foster High, I had never even heard of Nepal. This school has made my world a little bit bigger," said one student who recently moved from Florida. Acceptance, understanding and global awareness make every day a great day to be a bulldog.

## Legislative changes encourage better ALE accounting

Last session, the Legislature made significant changes to the classifying and reporting of Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs and students. The aim was to better account for ALE funding.

The law also mandated that the State Auditor's Office conduct biennial measures of student outcomes and financial audit of ALE courses from 2013-14 through 2016-17. It directed school districts to pay the associated cost.

As a result, the state will audit school districts' compliance with state laws and regulations and measure educational outcomes for ALE students in the coming year. The State Auditor's Office has already begun to contact districts, requesting information supporting ALE enrollment reporting.

Although the school districts will be billed for the time to complete the compliance audits, the State Auditor's Office has taken the following steps to minimize the costs to districts:

- Developed a strategy to align the compliance audit work with the size

of the school district's ALE program (see table below).

- Districts will not be billed for the travel necessary for the Auditor's School Programs specialist to perform the audit work on site at the districts.

Districts can reduce the time necessary to audit the ALE programs by providing the supporting documentation electronically

whenever possible.

Additionally, the performance audit work performed to evaluate the educational outcomes for ALE students will not be billed to the districts.

Contact Cheryl Thresher, School Programs Audit Manager at (360) 725-5608 for audit coverage for the ALE programs in your District.

	Number of ALE Programs FY 13	Students*	Percentage of Students	Planned ALE work
Programs with zero students	19	0.00	0%	None
.01 to 9.99 students	107	411.99	1%	None
10 to 100 students	162	6,776.42	24%	Biennial Desk Audit
>100 students	71	21,625.87	75%	Biennial Field Audit
Total ALE programs	359	28,814.28	100%	

\*Annual average full time equivalent

heard anyone say something like, “That’s a bad board — except for Mary Smith.”

What do boards work on together? Everything. Consider the three main areas of board responsibility: legislative, administrative, and judicial. The first area of responsibility, legislative, refers to policy making. Effective boards adopt policies that give direction to the superintendent and staff, enabling them to manage the district. The board should seek appropriate input in the development of policy, and after adoption should hold the superintendent and staff accountable for its implementation.

Administration is the second area of responsibility. It includes approving and monitoring the budget, approving and monitoring district contracts, and hiring and evaluating the superintendent and appropriate staff. The administration should present the draft budget based on the goals and objectives outlined by the school board. It is up to the board to ensure that goals and objectives are truly aligned with the spending outlined in the budget. As for contracts, many states give final approval and responsibility for major contracts to the local board. It is important that you understand the bidding process and follow ethical guidelines in approving all contracts.

Finally, the board’s judicial responsibility refers to hearing formal appeals sessions brought forward by staff, students, or parents. Naturally, these appeals require confidentiality, impartiality, and a full understanding of school law and regulations. The judicial function is sporadic, but handling appeals properly is critical to the effectiveness and fairness of a school board.

## 2. Respect the team

You were elected as an individual, but you’ll work as part of a team. The best way to succeed as a board is to practice collaboration and respect. Because boards deal with extremely difficult and vexing issues — from budgets to grievances and everything in between — it’s common for emotions to sometimes run high. Keep in mind that you’re in this for the long haul, and the best way to succeed is to be part of a strong team. Boards whose members treat one another with respect tend to be the most effective. Those whose members give in to acrimony tend to get less done.

Collaboration and respect don’t mean

consensus. Boards vote, and majorities rule. (But remember: This year’s majority could be next year’s minority.) There is honor in casting a sincere vote, win or lose. But, after the vote, effective boards move forward together. When you’re new, every challenge will be a first-time challenge. But you’ll come to realize that boards confront major issues all the time, and that a long-term commitment to collegiality and respect is critical to effective board governance.

The impact of respect goes beyond the board. The board sets the tone for the entire school system. Staff, students, parents, and the community are watching carefully to see how the board functions. Effective boards don’t only handle their own work well — they establish a model of collegiality and collaboration that builds confidence across the community that everyone is working to do what’s best for students.

## 3. Understand the difference between board and staff

Effective board members refrain from trying to perform management functions that are the responsibility of the superintendent and staff. As a board member, it is your responsibility (along with your fellow board members) to ensure that the schools operate well. But it is not your responsibility to run them. That’s what the superintendent is for.

Boards do have great power, but it can seem a strange kind of power to new members because it’s not the power to order individuals to “do this” or “stop doing that.” It’s the power to establish goals and policies, and then the power to demand accountability for reaching those goals and executing those policies.

The fundamental reason to refrain from trying to perform management functions is so you can hold the system — and above all, its leader, the superintendent — accountable for results. Accountability is the key, and many recent educational reforms aim to clarify and strengthen accountability.

If the superintendent understands that he or she will be held accountable by the board to reach goals and execute policies, then the board has achieved a key part of its work. If board members muddy accountability by trying to involve themselves in management functions, then any individual “win” in a particular case has the larger effect of undermining overall system

effectiveness.

Here’s a common situation for a new board member: You’ve been approached by concerned parents or community members about fixing an issue. If this happened during an election, you may have assured the concerned individuals you’d tackle this issue right away. You should listen to such concerns and questions, but rarely if ever will it be appropriate for you to directly contact a principal, a teacher, or a coach to try to solve the problem. That’s one of the main ways board members unintentionally diminish their effectiveness.

Part of your job is to help educate the school community about your responsibilities, explain the chain of command (or “chain of accountability,” as some board members call it), and direct concerned individuals to the appropriate staff person.

A useful guide for new board members is your school system’s policy on how to handle concerns from members of the public, to ensure that every concern gets a fair hearing and timely resolution. And if a concern merits board consideration, you should bring it up with your fellow board members.

## 4. Share and defend your views, but listen to the views of others

Your board sets the standard for communication within the district. Do you want your district to be open to a thorough discussion, or are you more interested in your own point of view? School board members must have the ability to compromise. You won’t “win” on every issue you care about. More importantly, sometimes you’ll find that the information, perspectives, and ideas others have may change your mind, or lead to a new and even better collaborative idea.

In the charged and urgent arena of public education, expect to be flexible, even as you seek to honor your deepest values and commitments. There will be times when changes must be made, when tradition cannot be honored, or when pressure must be resisted. Sometimes, you’ll measure the true success of a board not by agreement, but by respectful disagreement and spirited discussion followed by a difficult vote. And after a difficult vote, effective boards embrace the decision and move forward together.



## 5. Do your homework and ask tough questions

Members of effective boards come to meetings prepared to engage in discussions, ask questions, and seek clarification. A lot of background information is required to make policy and assess accountability. In meetings, asking sharp questions can help clarify issues not just for yourself, but for students, families, the community, and even school system employees. Here are some good questions to keep in mind:

- What is the goal of this initiative?
- How does it align with our vision, mission, and system goals?
- How much will it cost? What data tells us it's important enough to merit the cost?
- What data supports the notion that it will achieve the desired results?
- Are staff ready to implement it? If not, what's our plan?
- How does it fit with our existing activities? Does it conflict with anything we're already doing?
- How will we evaluate the results?

Board members are not career education professionals. Sometimes this feels like a handicap because of all the jargon, technical language, and policy details that board members, especially new board members, may not know. But keep in mind that, in American public education, local board members are not expected to be experts. They are responsible for serving as a bridge between lifelong education professionals and local communities.

To build the bridge, some board members like to ask plain questions. Michael Harvey, a board member in Maryland's Kent County, likes to encourage clarity and simplicity by asking, "How would you explain this policy to a parent?"

## 6. Respect your oath

Local school board membership is a public office and a public trust. New members swear an oath to uphold laws pertaining to public education. An important aspect of the public trust is to maintain confidentiality when appropriate. Many issues considered by school boards must be handled in confidence, in executive or closed sessions. These commonly include personnel issues, legal matters, negotiations,

land acquisition, and grievances.

Your state education laws determine which items must be considered in executive session or in appeals hearings, and specify the process for entering and exiting such a session. Everything discussed is confidential, with the exception of the summary public report the board president makes after the executive or closed session. If an individual board member divulges information from a closed or executive session, he or she may be held legally responsible. Significant costs and legal challenges may arise for the individual member, the board, and the entire school district.

Note that, while executive or closed sessions are permitted, most states require any action as a result of that executive session to be conducted in a public forum. Just as it is important to adhere to confidentiality for matters that should be confidential, it is important to ensure that no open-session topics are discussed, or actions taken, in executive or closed sessions. When in doubt, consult your board lawyer.

## 7. Keep learning

Effective board members participate in professional development and commit the time and energy necessary to be informed and effective leaders. You should understand your school system's vision, goals, and policies; its current successes, challenges, and opportunities; and the educational environment in your community.

Most importantly, you should know the aspirations and expectations of the

students and parents. At the national level, American public education is undergoing major and rapid changes. Understanding and translating them for your community's schools will require steady, ongoing work.

Many resources are available to you in this new position. You need to know about your state statutes and the organizing documents for your district. Work closely with your board chair and your superintendent to better understand district and board responsibilities. Your state school board association is a great resource for information and professional development. There are additional resources available through NSBA ([www.nsba.org](http://www.nsba.org)) and this magazine ([www.asbj.com](http://www.asbj.com)).

OK, new board members. That's our advice. Congratulations again on your new job and new responsibilities. It'll be exhausting, challenging, and sometimes painful. But, with luck, you'll share the experience of many other school board members in the great American tradition: the most rewarding job you will ever have.

Kathryn Blumsack ([kblumsack@mabe.org](mailto:kblumsack@mabe.org)) is director of board development for the Maryland Association of Boards of Education. Terry McCabe ([terry.a.mccabe@gmail.com](mailto:terry.a.mccabe@gmail.com)) is the former associate executive director for the Maine School Boards Association. Michael Harvey, a board member in Maryland's Kent County, contributed to this article.

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221 College Street N.E.  
Olympia, WA 98516-5313

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Mari Taylor, President . . . . . 425.314.1131  
Chris Nieuwenhuis, President-Elect . . . . . 509.290.1824  
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E-Mail . . . . . mail@wssda.org

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### January

- 15** Webinar:  
Next Generation  
Science Standards
- 25** Resolutions  
Committee Meeting
- 25-26** Board of Directors' Meeting
- 26-27** 2014 Legislative Conference
- 30** Webinar: Open Public  
Meetings Act and Board  
Meeting Agendas

### February

- 1** Average to Excellent  
Workshop, Ellensburg
- Webinar:
- 12** Best Practices for  
Transitioning Middle School  
Students to High School
- 27** Webinar for New Directors

### March

- 7-8** Leadership WSSDA
- Webinar:
- 12** Best Practices for Partnering  
with Post-Secondary Colleges/  
Universities and Vocational and  
Apprentice Programs
- 27** Webinar: Funding

### May

- 2-3** Leadership WSSDA
- 17** Average to Excellent  
Workshop, Arlington
- 27** Webinar for New Directors

### July

- 11-12** Leadership WSSDA
- 17** Average to Excellent  
Workshop, Rochester