



Direct

Washington State School Directors' Association

MAY 2014



Research shows that the use of stability balls help students focus in class, improves handwriting, small motor skills and posture.

OUR KIDS OUR FUTURE

Stability balls bring balance to the class

Fourth grade students in Alice Yang's class at Cape Horn-Skye Elementary are having a ball — or rather using them as chairs.

"I researched ways to help students who had difficulties sitting still and learned about the advantages of using stability balls in the classroom," Yang explained. "So a few months ago, I posted a project on DonorsChoose.org for a class set of stability balls to replace chairs. It was, to my surprise, funded and we have been using them for two weeks now.

"The first week was a little bouncy, as the kids were very excited to get to use them," Yang admitted. "After a lot of practice with knowing when it was okay to bounce and when it was time to sit still, I have noticed a big improvement in students staying in their seats. The balls are also used as an incentive

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#powerfulcommunication in 140 characters or less

Whether you use it or not, there's no denying Twitter has become a cultural force around the world.

The news media regularly report on noteworthy tweets. Twitter hashtags appear in advertisements, commercials, and television shows. Businesses use Twitter to answer customer questions. And, perhaps most importantly, Twitter has empowered anyone to share what's on his or her mind with everyone — 140 characters at a time.

This fast-growing social networking and microblogging service has more than 232 million active monthly users, including such notable people as Pope Francis, President Barack Obama, and

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

Schools and school leaders across the country are turning to Twitter as a communication tool. A survey released by the National School Boards Association and the Center for Digital Education in 2013 found 74 percent of U.S. school districts are on at least one social networking service, up 44 percent from two years earlier.

While Facebook is the most common social media service used by schools, many are joining Twitter. Hundreds of school districts, administrators, and school board members are using Twitter in Ohio alone.

"My school community loves my use of Twitter," says Joe Clark, superintendent of Nordon Hills City School District in

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Humble hero gone too soon

The education community was saddened by the passing of Dr. Jim Koval in late April.

Koval recently stepped in as Acting Executive Director for WSSDA and immediately spread his passion and professionalism to the office culture.

He led with a soft touch and a quiet confidence and accomplished many things during his short time with WSSDA.

A celebration of his life was held May 10 at the Koval Center for the Performing Arts with over 600 people in attendance.

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WSSDA BOARD MEMBER
David Iseminger

OPEN LETTER TO ARNE DUNCAN

With or without waiver, public schools strive for excellence

Last week you revoked Washington State's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver, resulting in nearly every school in Washington being considered failing by your Department of Education. This summer, as a School Board Director in Lake Stevens, WA, you're requiring I send a "failure letter" to parents of any school that receives your funding.

Your reason for revoking our waiver: we didn't pass legislation you wanted. More precisely, we passed legislation, but it didn't have the wording (actually, one specific word) you wanted.

Since you're so distant from us — nearly 3,000 miles by one measure — let me tell you about this other Washington: we have strong leadership in our board rooms, schools, and classrooms; we have professional and effective educators; and our students are capable, confident, and work extremely hard. But don't take my word for it — our SAT scores, among other measures, speak for us.

When NCLB was passed twelve years ago, it focused America's resolve to elevate our children and our future. It was about accountability, about setting lofty and worthwhile goals, but it was also about believing in our educators, leaders, parents, and students. It was about what we would strive for, work toward. It was aspirational.

Today, NCLB has been subverted into a name-calling, label-applying bully pulpit. It languished in Congress, now six years stale, until failure according to its antiquated yardstick has become a certainty.

We tried to help. With input and work from many education advocates, Congress was provided an extensive list of fixes that would make NCLB workable and forward-thinking, and keep us all accountable. I was

there too — as a member of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Federal Relations Network (FRN). I made the trek to Washington D.C. multiple times to ask our members to reauthorize, year after year. While there, many of us from Washington also met with people from your Department of Education, in your building, trying to create relationships and press for a change in policy and tone: stop telling our students and educators they're failing, I said.

In Lake Stevens — and in school districts across America — we lead by example. We create confidence, capacity, knowledge, and opportunity for everyone in our community. There is a palpable and ubiquitous culture of excellence in Lake Stevens, where it's common knowledge that each individual is supported, challenged, engaged, and empowered. Such things don't appear overnight, they're not accidental, and I have no intention of having our work undermined by distant labels and bracketed explanations.

The schools you'd have us call "failing" are anything but: we have Schools of Distinction (one of them four years running), we have Washington Achievement Awards schools, and we have a Reward School.

The leaders whom you also assert are failing — me included — are not. Our school board has won the national Magna Award and is a recognized Board of Distinction. I am an elected member to the Board of Directors for our state-level Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA), and my fellow Lake Stevens Board Director is President of WSSDA.

It's not that I don't understand your NCLB numbers or metrics. I work in the

Business Intelligence group at Microsoft, part of the Cloud + Enterprise Division, so data and analytics is what I do.

And I've done the analysis. I've weighed the cost of your revoked waiver and considered its benefits, and the conclusion is clear: it's not worth it.

You can keep the waiver. And regarding your failure letter — I have little interest in using our Lake Stevens letterhead to tell our students and educators they're failures, because they are not. That letter is the topic of much discussion in our state — including whether we send it at all.

Our school leaders are strong, our educators are exceptional, and our students are dedicated. Fourteen days before school, what they will hear from leaders in Lake Stevens is this: the bar this year is raised again, we believe in you, and you must continue to strive for excellence. They will hear that we are behind them, and that we believe in them without reservation, or caveat.

If you pull our funding, you'll be forsaking Washington's most needy students — the very students for whom the original ESEA legislation was passed 50 years ago. You'll be abandoning those students, but we won't. In Lake Stevens — and in every district across America — we'll do whatever we must to ensure no child is left behind, waiver or not.

The irony is not lost on me; you revoked our waiver because we didn't pass a law that you wanted. If you're not sure what to do with our education-related failure letter, I know 536 folks in Washington, D.C. who seem pretty deserving right now.

DAVID ISEMINGER is a WSSDA Board Member and Lake Stevens Board Member.

to finish work on time, and I've never had such high turn-in rates."

Fourth grader Andrew Seitz welcomed the stability ball over a regular chair. "They are really fun and more comfortable, plus they help you focus," he said. "When you get stuck on a problem you can bounce a little and that will get more blood to your brain. That will bring more ideas to your mind."

Seitz said the balls are easy to balance on and help to give you better posture. "You have to sit up straight to balance," he explained. The class also does exercises in the morning such as singing the "Nifty Fifty United States" song and bouncing and slapping the ball in rhythm.

"Research shows that the tiny movements kids make while balancing actually help stimulate the prefrontal cortex which does a lot of things, including inhibiting impulses," Yang explained. "Studies also show that because of the constant use of core muscles to balance on the chairs, students burn up a lot of excess energy throughout the day."

In addition to better posture, stability balls help students focus in class, especially high energy and students with ADHD. In many studies, the use of stability balls also improves handwriting and small motor skills.

DonorsChoose.org was responsible for outfitting the classroom with the stability balls. It is an online charity that makes it easy for anyone to help a classroom get materials they would like. Public school teachers from throughout the country post classroom project requests on the site, and donors sign up to give any amount to the project that inspires them the most.

When a project reaches its funding goal, Donors Choose ships the materials to the school. Teachers follow up with photos of the project taking place, a letter, and insight into how the money was spent.

"I'm hoping to see continued focus and improvement in quality of work, but also increased physical health," Yang said. "When the students feel good, they work better. The stability balls also help them feel more motivated about coming to school."

Cape Horn-Skye Elementary is part of the Washougal School District.



This story and many more can be found at www.ourkidswa.org. Send stories of your school district's successes to M.Wilson@wssda.org. There are currently over 50 schools represented. Is yours included?



PRESIDENT
Mari Taylor

We are anything but failing

I had a great time at a failing school last week. At the outset, first, third and fifth-graders proudly shared their opinion essays, citing text, video and online resources to back their claims — the Common Core gauntlet. An all school choir performed two of the songs they will be presenting at our district choir concert next week. Teachers and students demonstrated mastery of technology, presentation skills and community engagement. My face hurt from grinning. And our secondary administrators were quickly calculating how long they have to prepare for these little prodigies.

Of course this school and the rest in our district are anything but failing. No distorted federal label is going to change that. The waiver, its revocation and punitive sanctions are merely clumsy attempts to resolve the effects of an ill-conceived law. Take a trip around our state and the evidence is irrefutable.

This week during small schools visits we witnessed the extraordinary work that occurs every ordinary day in our schools. Schools with 99% poverty with graduation rates well above 90%; ingenuity and initiative creating opportunities for exploration and scholarship in science and technology; communities banding together to replace ancient buildings; a superintendent assailed with hugs as we walked into a kindergarten classroom; dedicated, smart, compassionate educators who understand that our work is about each and every child who comes through our doors. We are anything but failing.

Now more than ever it is critically important that we lift each other up with support and inspiration to ensure that teachers, staff, administrators, board members and kids are reminded of the great success of our public schools — the real story. We've been shouldering the effects of privatization propaganda and politically-motivated undermining of public schools with increasing force; a cacophony of misinformation and derision erodes public support and begins to wear on even our most dedicated educators. We have the power to change that for each other.

At WSSDA we have been blessed by the ultimate reminder of the importance of the work that we do. In our brief time together, Dr. Jim Koval embodied the courage, faith and passion that we all share. Jim's commitment to children and public education reinvigorated and inspired board members and staff alike. Jim lived what it means to believe in the people around you, to commit to a bright future through our children.

As we begin to heal and move forward we have the opportunity to validate that faith by standing together. And if you find yourself needing a little lift to renew your passion and commitment, spend some time in any of our remarkable public schools.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mari Taylor".

It takes grit to achieve academic success

BY RACHEL WARD

Grit's role in student achievement has become a hot topic for educators across the country. Defined as the "perseverance needed to accomplish long-term goals in the face of challenges and obstacles", grit is most certainly related to academic success.

Recent studies found grit to be an accurate predictor of academic performance. Historically, a student's grades and standardized test scores were believed to be the strongest indicators for how well a student may perform, but grit has shown to be just as reliable.

Research suggests that grit and perseverance may be more important than innate intelligence in student achievement and ultimately, GPAs. While "smarter" students may rely on their intellect alone, their peers who might not display as much natural ability compensate by showing more resolve and working harder. In the end, it is the students with "grittier" tendencies, not the highest IQ, who achieve the highest GPAs.

The research proposes that

grit and resilience can be taught. Fostering them in the classroom requires educators to create learning environments that support these non-cognitive traits. Students should have opportunities to pursue goals that are important to them and that they see as worthy of their efforts.

Passion for their pursuit is vital to student success when it comes to long-term goals and overcoming obstacles. A demanding yet supportive environment that encourages persistence through difficulties is necessary for student success.

While research on the benefits of grit continues, the current findings imply that if properly promoted both in school and at home, grit has the potential to noticeably boost academic achievement.

To find out more about grit and the research behind it, please read the April edition of WSSDA's Research Blast. All issues of the blast can be found on www.wssda.org. Just select the News tab for the link to WSSDA Research Blast.

RACHEL WARD is WSSDA's Research Analyst.



Governor Jay Inslee recently signed SB 6163, Expanded Learning Opportunities.

Marie Sullivan departs for new challenge

Marie Sullivan, WSSDA's Director of Governmental Relations, announced her resignation in mid-April.

"It's been a privilege to serve school board members from across the state these past four sessions," Sullivan said. "We've had many successes, including passing three bills in each of the past three sessions, increased attendance at legislative events, and a well-informed set of school director advocates on the hill."

Sullivan joined WSSDA in 2010 after extensive work in communications and legislative relations at other state agencies. She broke into government with the Department of Licensing before moving on to the Information Services and Commerce departments. During her nearly 30-year career in government relations and communications, she has also worked for private and non-profit firms.

"Marie did a tremendous job of raising our profile on the hill and that translated into a more effective legislative presence for WSSDA," said WSSDA President Mari Taylor. "Anyone who has witnessed Marie in action will have no doubt that she will be enormously successful in her new venture. We wish her the best!"

Sullivan has started her own business as a contract lobbyist.



Inspire. Celebrate. Lead., theme set for conference in Spokane

Registration for this year's conference in Spokane will open soon. Your fellow school directors on the conference planning committee did a great job setting the direction for this to be another outstanding event.

Conference planners selected a theme that focuses on leadership and builds on elements that stood out in last year's keynote sessions, such as inspiration and the importance of relationships

The theme and conference strands are designed to spark energy and optimism. The strands include governing with excellence, contemporary issues in education, success and well-being, advocacy and community engagement, and change for the better.

Two of the early bird workshops will allow

you time to dig deep into key topics: finance and collective bargaining and the role of the board president/chair. An off-site session to the local Skills Center may be another popular option for veteran board members, while first year directors will want to attend the New Board Boot Camp.

Finally, the planning committee set the goal of inviting keynote speakers who are inspirational, motivational, and understand school directors. (See sidebar for lineup)

Keep an eye out for the opening of registration. It will be publicized both at www.wssda.org and in eClippings. Meanwhile, encourage your fellow board members to attend. With a very big year coming up in education policy and legislation, this is a conference you will not want to miss.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS Inspiring lineup echoes theme

SCOTT CRABTREE

A passionate student and teacher of neuroscience, psychology, and the science of happiness, Scott's message is sure to increase engagement, productivity, and creativity.

ANGELA MAIERS

Author of "The Passion Driven Classroom," Angela was a hit at the recent NSBA conference and shined in her Tedx Talk, "You Matter."

GENE SHARRAT

A much-respected local leader and lifelong student of effective leadership, Gene is the current Executive Director of the Washington Student Achievement Council.

Annual report highlights solid accomplishments in 2013



The recently released 2013 WSSDA Annual Report highlights 10 major accomplishments, led by a healthy financial balance, effective legislative advocacy and a top notch annual conference.

WSSDA continued to hold the line on

expenditures in 2013, allowing it to keep dues flat for the third straight year. Revenue of \$3,094,385 exceeded spending for the year, adding about \$472,000 to the association's fund balance.

"We recognize that districts have enough difficulty with everything else that is going up in price and we will continue to do what we can to help out," said WSSDA President Mari Taylor. Spending in 2013 was about the same level as six years ago, despite inflation.

Annual Conference garners strong marks

Based on both attendance and survey results, the 2013 Annual Conference marked one of the most popular in history. About 1,040 people participated, well above the total for any going back at least five years. The crowd included more than 681 school directors from 208 school districts, as well as 175 superintendents and 40 student representatives. Both conference and pre-conference registrations were stronger than anticipated, at least 110 higher than in 2012. The overall conference rating was the highest ever at 97

percent good or excellent.

New policies and procedures mark busy year

WSSDA issued 12 new policies and procedures and overhauled much of the rest of its policy and legal products to better serve schools and school directors. The association merged two publications to create *Policy & Legal News*, with a completely new design, layout and visual appeal. The result was a 10 percent increase in subscriptions. WSSDA also revamped its consulting program with a new pricing structure and menu of services and its contract process for greater efficiency and accountability.

In addition, the report headlines the following key accomplishments:

- Webinars move from pilots to full scale
- Website shows dramatic jump in traffic
- Board self-assessments blossom in 2013
- Superintendent Evaluation Initiative launched
- WSSDA re-enters world of social media

The report is now on line at www.wssda.org under the About Us tab.

Northfield, Ohio. “They enjoy being in the loop on the internal happenings of the school, and they appreciate information I share with them related to the world of education.”

The value of Twitter

Twitter offers schools a powerful platform to provide real-time information to students, parents, and community members — and at no cost. Twitter limits users to very succinct messages, known as tweets. Tweets, for the unacquainted, are like long newspaper headlines. They often, but not always, contain a link to a Web page for more information.

Since tweets are so short and quick-hitting, users tend to share content more frequently on Twitter than on social networking services such as Facebook.

Clark sends tweets on his smartphone throughout the day to update the community on what’s happening in his district, including posting photos of students and teachers in action. He says he tweets 30 to 50 times a day, which makes him a heavy user, even by Twitter standards.

“I use Twitter for five main reasons,” he says. “To inform the community about district events and what I am doing; to brag about the great things our students and staff are doing; to share content related to the field of education; to share random thoughts I have about leadership, how we should treat kids or the mission of school; and to engage in my own professional development.”

Clark uses hashtags — words preceded by the symbol # — to discuss education topics with Twitter users around the world. Hashtags are a way for users to categorize their tweets by topic so others can follow a conversation and join in.

Clark participates in a number of regular Twitter chats for the sake of professional development. He is a co-moderator of #ptchat, a weekly Twitter chat for parents, family engagement practitioners, teachers, and others to discuss new and innovative partnership approaches.

While Twitter is a valuable tool for connecting with educators worldwide, its primary benefit to schools and school leaders is that it allows them to engage in conversations with people in their communities.

“Twitter can open lines of communication with stakeholders and create advocacy for a

district,” says Erika Daggett, chief information officer with the Sycamore Community Schools in Cincinnati, Ohio, and president of the Ohio School Public Relations Association.

“It can encourage strong two-way communication and create a more transparent and authentic understanding of a district. It’s also a great way to share your brand, spread news, market services, and educate an audience.”

Best practices

Daggett recommends doing some homework before joining Twitter or any hot, new social media platform.

“I would advise school districts [to] do a bit of research to confirm the audience they want to reach is actually on Twitter,” she says. “It’s a lot of work to properly manage a Twitter account, so I would make sure there is a return on investment before leaping onto any social media platform.”

Sycamore Community Schools surveyed nearly 700 parents, students, residents, alumni, and staff to learn about their online habits before launching its social media campaign in February 2012. The district rolled out its Twitter page a year later after additional studies and educational efforts. Sycamore made it a priority to educate students, parents, residents, alumni, and staff about privacy issues and

the appropriate use of social media.

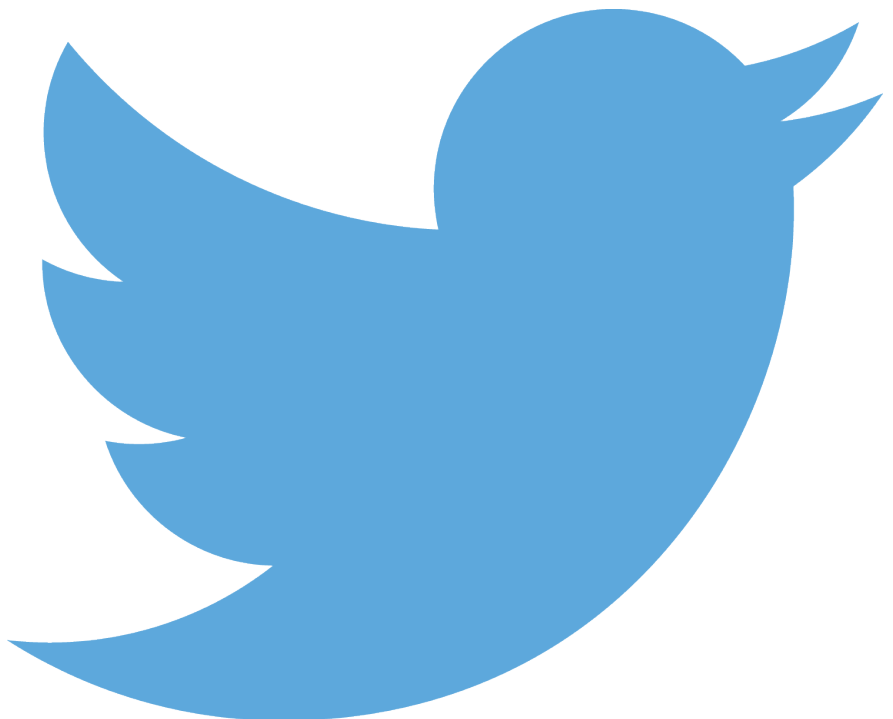
“We decided to use Twitter as a niche communication channel that told the story of student achievement and staff commitment in real time,” Daggett says. “Community members can expect live tweets and photos from school board meetings, sporting events, student performances, school programs, and much more.”

It’s important schools and school leaders share content regularly on Twitter and respond to any questions from users, which means closely monitoring social media. There are a number of free Web-based tools, such as www.hootsuite.com, that allow users to schedule tweets in advance and coordinate messages with other people responsible for generating social media content.

School districts should determine the type of content they want to share on Twitter and decide who is responsible for generating it, says Eric Germann, a board member with Lincolnview Local School District in Van Wert, Ohio.

“My advice would be to coordinate your social media efforts in-house, not so much to necessarily control content, but to ensure uniform branding and aligned messaging,” Germann says. “You can still give autonomy to the groups for the content, but get them

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on the same page as to the overall image the district is trying to project.”

Potential pitfalls

Twitter, Germann says, can have many benefits for school board members, but it has to be used correctly.

“While it can be used in a positive way, it also enables one to very quickly expose the bad choices one might make,” he says. “As a board member, you can’t hide on Twitter, even if you protect your tweets. So, don’t say or retweet anything you wouldn’t say in a board meeting in public.”

Germann uses Twitter for professional development and to act as a “proud parent and booster” for his district by highlighting positive news. He says he makes a conscious effort on Twitter to ensure he is perceived as a single board member and not “the official voice” of the school district.

“Used correctly, board members can use Twitter to noninvasively reach into the lives of some of these kids and their parents, and meet them where they’re at,” Germann says. “We have to engage people wherever they are.”

Candice Christon, an attorney with the Ohio School Boards Association, advises schools and school leaders to analyze the content of their tweets carefully before sharing them.

“The comments they post on Twitter not only reflect on their school districts, but also their tweets may be subject to public records laws and protections against the disclosure of personally identifiable student information,” Christon says.

Each school district, she says, must determine how it will use social media, if comments will be allowed, and how comments will be monitored and addressed. Districts also should review all legal terms and conditions associated with the social media sites they are using.

Christon says: “Twitter can be an extremely valuable communication tool for schools, but appropriate precautions and training must be put in place so social media is used responsibly.”

Bryan Bullock is a communication coordinator with the Ohio School Boards Association, which has the largest presence on Twitter of any state school boards association. He is responsible for the association’s social media efforts, and has spoken on social media at state and national education conferences and events. This article is reprinted with permission from American School Board Journal. Copyright 2014 National School Boards Association. All rights reserved.

Deadline fast approaching for nominating and applying for 2015 officer positions

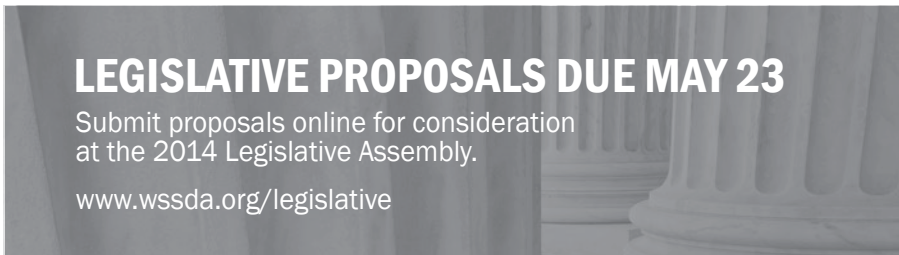
We invite you to apply as a candidate to run for president-elect or vice president for 2015. As a WSSDA member, we also ask you to consider nominating fellow school board members that you feel would make great future leaders of our association.

The position of WSSDA president-elect is open to all directors. This year’s vice president must be from east of the

Cascades.

Nominate potential candidates by May 20. Fill out our online form or complete and return the Officer Candidate Nomination Form you received by mail.

To apply as a candidate, fill out our online form at www.wssda.org or complete and return the Officer Candidate Application you received by mail. Applications must be received at WSSDA by June 8.



LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS DUE MAY 23
 Submit proposals online for consideration at the 2014 Legislative Assembly.
www.wssda.org/legislative



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May

- 14 Webinar
- 29 Webinar for New Board Members

August

- 13 Webinar
- 22-24 Board of Directors' Retreat

October

- 25 Legislative Committee Meeting

June

- 18 Webinar
- 20, 21 Board of Directors Meeting
- 20, 21 Legislative Committee Meeting
- 27-29 NSBA Pacific Region Summer Institute

September

- 17 Webinar
- 18 Board of Directors Meeting
- 18 Resolutions Committee Meeting
- 18 Legislative Committee Meeting
- 19-20 Legislative Assembly
- 25 Webinar for New Board Members

November

- 18 Board of Directors Meeting
- 19 Resolutions Committee Meeting
- 19-22 Annual Conference
- 22 Board of Directors Meeting

July

- 16 Webinar
- 18, 19 Legislative Committee Meeting
- 31 Webinar for New Board Members

December

- 17 Webinar