

The Business of Education

Going Paperless

What do school boards need to know about using a board management system?

PAPERLESS BOARD MEETINGS—USING an electronic system for agendas, calendars, and other board materials—can save districts thousands of dollars in copying and paper costs, as well as in staff time.

The benefits are many, but a paperless e-governance system requires changes in board culture, and consideration of training, security, and legal issues, according to President and Chief Architect of Emerald Data Solutions Ari Ioannides. His company developed the BoardDocs e-governance system.

Ioannides recently talked with ASBJ Editor-in-Chief Kathleen Vail about what board members should know when they're considering moving to an e-governance system.

How much of a change is it to go paperless?

Board members and administrators perceive going to a board management service as a radical change—like going from a telegraph machine to an iPhone. It's not that radical. Done right, using

a board management service should look like what you're doing now, just easier—like going from a typewriter to computer for word processing. It's not as dramatic as people think.

Before widespread use of computers, people had no concept what it was like to use one. We all thought learning to use one would be hard. We were fearful, but we wanted to do it because there was a huge benefit. People are most afraid of using a board management system right before it gets implemented. After they've been through training, the first thing out of their mouth is: Why did we wait so long? Anyone who has used our system loves it and would never go back. It would be like saying, "You can't use the car anymore. You can use a bike."

How does a paperless system save time and money?

Right now, if a district doesn't have a board management service, it has staff gathering documents and printing out a master copy. Then they go to a scanner and make a PDF. It gets printed, copied, scanned, posted to the website, then bound and shipped out to others. Any changes to the packet starts the process over again. If a board meets twice a month, this is done 24 times a year. With a good board management service, the material automatically gets

released to board members and everyone else who needs it via the district's website. A district can see \$20,000 to \$30,000 in cost savings the first year in labor, printing, and mailing costs.

How important is data security?

The system's security must be rock-solid tight. School boards deal with confidential data—health information, student discipline, land purchasing, and lawsuits—that has to be secured, by law. Data must be encrypted and be maintained on a secure server. With BoardDocs, we believe board documents must be as secure as banking information. Local copies of the data and email are very insecure. Information needs to be physically and electronically secured.

What about legal issues?

With BoardDocs, we make sure the system complies with applicable laws. Public information needs to be distributed to the public easily. We provide districts the ability to make sure data that is supposed to be secure cannot be seen by the public. The system should provide no collaboration with board members. If there's collaboration, it is an electronic meeting and it would have to be open to the public.

What else should board members look for?

Ease of use is huge. Most board members are like me—born before 1960. Technology is not second nature. Any board management system has got to be easy to use.



ONLINE EXTRA

For more information about BoardDocs, go to www.boarddocs.com.