

School Board Meeting Assignment

I watched a recording of the Metropolitan Nashville Board of Public Education's first virtual meeting on April 15, 2020. Due to Covid-19, the school board was unable to have an in-person experience. Because this was the first time meeting in this format, there seemed to be some initial complications with technology, where it took some time before most board members were online and present for the roll call. Seven of the nine board members were in attendance, while the other two were not present. The chairwoman directed the beginning portion of the meeting. Much of the discussion was focused on the changes happening due to Covid-19, and a major aspect of the meeting consisted of the members trying to understand and find clarity in the topics being brought up.

The first financial topic which was discussed was the issue that Read to be Ready is no longer funding the school system like they have in the past. Because of this, United Way of Greater Nashville was able to raise funds to replace this amount for the schools. The members talked about what this would look like, and many professionals requested clarity on the topic. When it came to voting, each member's name would be announced, and they would respond with either "I" or "no". Throughout this process, different members would request the opportunity to either give input on the situation or ask a question about the topic. Given the internet format for the meeting, this was made tangible as one person would be given the "screen" to speak about the issue.

The next topic was centered around ELA and the potential opportunities and methods which teachers should be using to teach students, given the circumstances. This topic involved one board member presenting her major concerns with putting too much stress or pressure on teachers while they are already facing several obstacles. In this discussion, the budget was

mentioned because several board members are trying to understand how the budget should be dispersed now that the education system looks much different. The biggest question which came up was: Should more funds be invested into online learning, since that seems to be the direction in which everyone is headed?

In regard to the climate of the meeting, most all members seemed to be calm and on good terms with each other. The biggest pattern which I picked up on was that most everyone feels very confused and is trying to seek clarity. On most topics which were discussed, one common response from board members would be: “We need more time to think and discuss this issue.” There did not appear to be any indifference from members, rather, many of them just wanted to understand what circumstances will look like for the next few months. Unfortunately, the situation of Covid-19 has made the decision-making process even more tricky.

In my personal reflection, I believe that this was a very useful learning experience for me to sit in on this meeting. I think that the points where individuals seemed scattered or confused brought to light the reality that dealing with major decisions in educational systems can be incredibly complex. I noticed that many professionals were able to be tactful and aimed to collaborate with each other, even when discussions got confusing. One of the major themes I picked up on was the desire for board members to “guess” or “predict” what things will look like months down the road, in order to guide their decision-making. This is challenging, of course, because no one can predict the future, especially not in these current times. I believe that school social workers could bring a valuable presence to these meetings, because they see and experience so many different viewpoints, angles, and perspectives during their work. In a situation like this, social workers could bring up topics or issues which others would not know about, and they could have potential insight towards solutions which others would have missed.

Agenda

Due to the circumstances of listening to the meeting via an internet session, I was unable to obtain a copy of the agenda.

Location: Metropolitan Nashville Board of Public Education: Virtual Meeting

Date: April 15, 2020