

Board Role vis-à-vis the Administration During COVID

Question: [NOTE – this one is specific to independent schools.]

Given recent ISCA online conversations about schools and the evolving COVID-19 situation, please advise Board Chairs on how the Board can act appropriately as ‘partners in leadership’ if schools are contemplating any of the scenarios listed below that are self-directed v. instructed by government officials. There are potential legal implications to some of these actions, so does the board ‘weigh-in’ or formally approve any of the actions stated below?

Please indicate the extent of any board involvement for each of the scenarios below:

- *Banning spectators from sporting events*
- *Cancelling school field trips or travel trips*
- *Cancelling sports and social events at school that involve parents or the general public*
- *Closing school temporarily for cleaning*
- *Closing school indefinitely and moving to online learning*
- *Cancelling admissions related school visits/tours*
- *Cancelling graduation ceremonies*
- *Requiring faculty, staff and students to self-quarantine based on school-imposed criteria related to travel.*

From a governance perspective, are there other issues you would advise Boards to be addressing related to the COVID-19 situation?

Answer:

From a governance perspective, I agree with Bethany’s recent Online Forum post that said: *“It seems that the primary responsibility of the Board is to make sure there IS a plan in place to deal with the evolving COVID 19 situation. That might include making sure there is a ‘crisis management team’ identified at the school who will be responsible for developing action plans. In this case, a proactive plan, a response plan, and a communication plan might want to be considered. A proactive plan would involve the school’s (voluntary) decision to implement changes to reduce risk of exposure based on some defined criteria established by the school; a response plan would involve plans as a result of government (local or state) issued restrictions that impact how the school conducts normal business. And as a part of every risk management plan is a communication plan. The Board should be made aware of these plans and consulted as necessary to provide support and guidance.”*

As ‘partners in leadership’ with the Head, the board should take its cues from the board chair, of whom the Head is well-advised to keep closely apprised of how the school is handling the COVID-19 situation. A calm and straightforward communique should go to the board from the Head of School (or from the Head and Chair). In your list above, I do not see *any* items that should involve the board; the items listed are for the Head to determine. The Head might seek input from the Board Chair, or the Executive Committee (other board leaders or officers); but these things are the Head’s call. The Head should then inform the board and the community about steps being taken and what to expect. Ideally, there is a place where members of the school community can check online for daily updates. It is essential that

administration and board exhibit the leadership qualities that everyone wants in times like these—honesty, integrity, transparency, situational and self-awareness, caring, and calmness.