

Conference Report: 75th ISBA Annual Fall Conference (09/23-24/2024)

By *Laurence Wang* (09/25/2024)

I attended this conference from 09/23 09:15AM to 09/24 12:15PM. About 1,000 attendees for this year's fall conference.

I attend both general session in the morning of day 1 and day 2. In day 1 general session, after award ceremony of the Lorin A. Burt Outstanding Boardmanship, and Superintendent of the Year, keynote speaker Sam Glenn delivered a speech titled "The Strength of the Pack". I like the concept that the strength of the wolf is in the pack and the strength of the pack is in the wolf, which is a good picture of the relationship between individual board member and the board. This concept demonstrates teamwork, unity, and the importance of both collective efforts and individual accountability. While delivering this motivating speech, he also painted a 3-panel wolf paint. I found Sam's speech is very encouraging.

Day 2 general assembly was mainly filled with 2 interviews of IN governor candidates: Senator Mike Braun and Dr. Jennifer McCormick. Some key issues, such as candidates' top priorities, public education funding and increasing school cost, teachers compensation/benefits, property tax etc. were covered during interviews. I found each of them have a good vision and plan for IN public education.

I also attended 5 clinic sessions:

- I. 2024 Legislation Issues for Capital Projects: this session was hosted by Greg Elkins (CFO of Mt. Vernon CSC) and Tim Jensen (President of Veridus Group Inc.). Several public capital projects related sections of Indiana Code (IC) and Indiana Admin Code (IAC) were quickly reviewed. The pro and cons of most commonly used project delivery methods (such as Design-Bid-Build, Construction Manager Agency; Design-Build; Build-Operate-Transfer etc.) are examined carefully with the consideration of cost, schedule, financing, risk allocation/transfer and control. Some best practices about Capital project planning and implementation were reviewed too. I am happy to notice that our school corp. has implemented many of those best practices, such as facility study/survey, 10-year capital project planning, 3-year financial/budget plan, demographics study, debt service

revenue projections, proactive debt service levy rate management, and GAV and NAV forecast/estimations.

- II. Planting the SEEDS of Change: How to Nurture and Grow Your Newcomers with Care. Kathy Nimmer (director of SEEDS - Supporting Educators Entering District Service in TSC) and Scott Handback (superintendent of TSC) hosted this session. SEEDS is an innovative, non-evaluative 2-year program which provides holistic and multi-layer support for new teachers in TSC. Kathy facilitates the one-on-one mentor-mentee efforts, and she shared examples how mentors could support the mentees, most of whom are in early stage of their career, and help mentees navigate first 2 years in TSC. The program also setup survey collecting feedbacks from teachers about why they stay or leave, so that necessary support could be provided for their most needed. One of many benefits of this program is improving teacher retention, which in turn reduces teacher turnover. It also helps enhance teachers' morale and brand loyalty. After the Q&A section, I stopped by with follow up questions about how school admin collects teachers' feedback/needs etc., any anonymous survey used? I was told anonymous survey is not necessary, since the close one-on-one mentor-mentee connection/relationship enables mentor to provide personalized and most needed support for each mentee. I am convinced the SEEDS initiative is an effective way to nurture, grow, and retain new/youth teachers in public schools.
- III. What Does Financial Oversight Look Like? A Guide to Fiscal Accountability. Dr. Michele Moore (Asst. Professor of IU) hosted this session. After listing 3 essential elements - governance, planning and accountability - of good stewardship, Michele explained school board governance authority, major roles and responsibilities. She also went through sample monthly reports (Fund report, cash flow report, constructions project etc.) to elaborate how to read school financial reports. For planning, she listed all the key information (ADM, property tax regime, one time/recurring cost, role of cash balance etc.) a board member should know before working on the annual budget. Regarding accountability, the fiscal indicators report, and corporation wide internal control system was discussed in detail. I found the

list of good questions related school finance for board member to ask is very helpful. With those key questions/data, board members could make well informed decisions and actions.

- IV. Leveraging AI to streamline admin tasks and to enhance educator development through instructional feedback mechanism: Fayette County SC and EES Innovation hosted this session. An AI-driven feedback tool with ability to streamline school leadership's support for classroom teachers, enhance classroom management, and strengthen core instruction/teacher-student interaction was presented. This tool's personalized feedbacks and actionable insights are particularly effective as evidenced by 3-year steady improvement of students' performance in ELA and math proficient at Fayette County SC. This session also includes a demo of the tool and Q&A section. I found this app enhances the collaboration between admin and teachers, and eventually improves students' performance.
- V. Leveraging P-12 and University Partnerships: Elevating College Readiness and Career Development Opportunities and Programs. 2 presenters from Indiana University and 2 school districts' superintendents hosted this session. IU's partnership with 12 local school districts was presented and discussed during the session. The details of several collaborative learning enrichment programs for high school students, such as dual-credit, dual enrollment, career exploration/development, and student advising on college education/campus life etc., was provided and discussed.

Overall, this one and half day's conference is perfect continuous learning opportunity, and very helpful for me to perform my public service duties in a better way.