



With continued uncertainty surrounding the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the public is looking to their school district leadership teams to provide accurate information and a unified message to families and the general public.

Meetings, events, and normal routines were suddenly interrupted all over the world. On March 25, 2020 Governor Scott issued a “Stay Home, Stay Safe” order, which is still in place despite local, incremental re-opening. The next day, the Governor dismissed in-person instruction at schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. Districts were charged with implementing continuity of learning plans by April 13. All of a sudden, providing education and delivering services looked completely different than we have seen before.

Your board and superintendent have vital and unique roles to play as this unprecedented event continues to unfold. With the situation changing daily, best practices are as important as ever. VSBA added a web page with the latest information from many sources pertaining to school district oversight at [www.vtvsba.org/corona](http://www.vtvsba.org/corona).

## **What Can School Board Members Do to Best Serve Their District?**

The school board and superintendent should stay connected. Social distancing is the watchword, but boards need to stay together, even if at a distance. Though in-person meetings are cancelled during the Governor’s state of emergency, stay in touch with your governance team members. Stay connected with your community. They are looking for your district’s calm and capable leadership.

Boards rapidly moved their meetings to digital platforms like Zoom, Google Hangouts, GoToMeeting, etc. On March 30, the Governor signed a [bill which temporarily modified the Open Meeting Law](#), including elimination of the requirement to designate a physical location for public meetings. For the latest on the Open Meeting Law, please consult [this summary](#) and the COVID-19 page of the VSBA website at [www.vtvsba.org/corona](http://www.vtvsba.org/corona).

The leadership team should be concentrating on making remote meetings work when trying to involve the wider community in these times, too. Proactively seeking community partnerships (private and public) to extend web access into the community is one option to explore.

As your team discovers what works best for remote meetings and distance learning, we encourage you to share those best practices and resources (digital or analog) with the VSBA so that we can share them with member boards. VSBA has included resources on [Tips for Video Conferencing Board Meetings](#) and [Video Conference Etiquette](#) on our website.

## **Let Your Superintendent Lead**

This is the time for your superintendent to manage the district. They need to make most decisions that are being made at this time.

Allow your superintendent or other designated spokesperson to continue to be the voice and face of your district. Relying on the chain of command as a best practice is as important as ever.

There's no need to publicly challenge your superintendent's decisions right now. It only leads to more confusion in the community. Stay in regular contact with your superintendent, and call emergency board meetings only when the meeting is necessary for the good and welfare of your district.

## The Leadership Team Should Know the Message

Make sure your district maintains a unified public message and remember to let your superintendent or other designated person be the official voice of your district.

Promote messages that are:

1. Supported by your full leadership team
2. Clear, calm, and reassuring
3. Factual (Here's what we know, here's what we are doing, here are organizations we are working with.)
4. Showing leadership in communicating about health practices (not just school stuff). Schools are often the primary source of information about health and nutrition.

Take time to connect with your community, too. Share positive messages through video on social media. Share hope, gratitude, and compassion in a world facing panic and a pandemic.

## The VSBA is Here to Help

In addition to the [COVID-19 page](#) providing extensive resources of the latest developments in Vermont, VSBA is working to support school boards however possible during this difficult time.

1. The office is physically closed, but VSBA staff are all working remotely and can still be contacted by email. We are also checking our voicemail daily. For more urgent matters, each staff member has provided her cell phone number on her outgoing office voicemail. The office phone number is 802-223-3580.
  - a. Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director, Extension 113
  - b. Sandra Cameron, Director of Public Policy, Extension 112
  - c. Susan Holson, Director of Education Services, Extension 111
  - d. Kerri Lamb, Director of Operations, Extension 110
2. The legislature is focused on responding to the 2019 novel coronavirus pandemic in Vermont. VSBA staff is monitoring all legislative activity and will continue to report on relevant developments on the COVID-19 page on the website and through Legislative Update emails.
3. We want to make sure we're addressing our members' needs. Please provide your input to us at [VSBA Member Inquiries](#).
4. VSBIT and VSA sponsored a legal team to answer questions which arise due to the pandemic. Archives of all questions that have already been answered by the legal team are available [here](#). If you have a question that has not already been answered, please direct it to Sue Ceglowski, VSBA Executive Director, at [sceglowski@vtvsba](mailto:sceglowski@vtvsba). We will send out an email as new questions and answers become available.
5. VSBA will be hosting webinars and/or sending out documents and videos as new information becomes available. Please check your email frequently for details since these programs may not have much advance warning. [Archives of all VSBA webinars](#) are always available on our website.
6. The School Board U Webinar scheduled for April 2, *Welcome to New Board Members*, was converted to a video resource because communication with newly elected board members was compromised by district offices closing or operating with skeletal staff. Please share this resource with all new members on your board!