

Restoring Our Communities

While we have reason for optimism in the coming year, we must continue to adapt our human resources strategy to nurture our school communities.



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I'm writing this column in the closing weeks of December, the final month of one of the most difficult years any of us have ever faced. Summer's progress in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic all but collapsed in the fall, as schools have continued to wrestle with the complexity of teaching students well and keeping everyone safe. The new year can't come soon enough.

With a vaccine at hand, we should be able to return to in-person learning and some semblance of normality in the next school year, though 2021 is sure to hold plenty of challenges itself.

The first order of business for us in 2021 is advocating for teachers to be among those first vaccinated, following health care workers and the most vulnerable. As many have noted, teachers are essential not only to student learning and growth but also to overall societal recovery. They are a lynchpin to school success, and schools are a lynchpin to community health — enabling not only children to learn and grow but millions of parents to get back to full-time work. Since the start of the pandemic, teachers have literally put their lives on the line for all of us. We need to ensure their physical and emotional safety in the coming months.

Following this, we will — we hope — move from the upheaval that threw us into survival mode back to a focus on institutional sustainability and wellness. Wellness is key. While this past year has shown us the remarkable agility and resilience of schools and educators, everyone's batteries are low. Independent schools pride themselves on being excellent institutions of learning, but we also know we can demand too much of ourselves. In making 2021 a year of healing and regeneration, schools need to be conscious of finding the right work-life balance and prioritizing physical and emotional health.

In these unprecedented times, how do we help those in our communities feel personally valued and professionally nurtured? How can we help galvanize our schools? In terms of the business angle, what is the HR strategy?

While specific tactics will likely differ, all of our schools need business officers who are not only good with the books but who also understand the school culture and community. They need business officers to be multifaceted communicators who can explain the myriad aspects of operations to all constituents. They need business officers who are adept at relationship building. They need business officers who are attuned to everything from the community's technology needs to the why behind the school's diversity mission. And they need business officers who are in tune with developments of the larger independent school community, in human resources and every aspect of the business office.

I know we can get where we need to go if we make 2021 the year of connection. This year presents us with the need for ongoing examination of what a quality school looks like today and how we can continue to evolve our programs, policies and practices. We can do this work better when we do it together — supporting each other and sharing ideas and insights.

I'm particularly looking forward to the 2021 NBOA Annual Meeting in late February, which will be held entirely online. This year, with a new registration model, when you register one individual from your school, your entire staff can attend at no additional cost. This may be an opportunity to nourish those who have been working so hard and invest in them at a time they need that most. We see this year's event as a call to action — an opportunity to strengthen our collective skills to help ensure that our schools heal, regroup and thrive.

I look forward to connecting with you in this essential endeavor. 

