
Board Meeting Broadcast Project

Preliminary Report
August 02, 2017

OVERVIEW

July 10, 2017: Members of the Galesburg Board of Education expressed a desire to explore broadcasting Board Meetings. District #205 Assistant Superintendent Jennifer Hamm asked Matt Jacobson, District Technology Curriculum & Professional Development Coordinator, to lead this work. Three goals were developed for this project.

GOALS

1. Research the pros & cons of broadcasting School Board Meetings
2. Research existing practices for broadcasting meetings of other boards
3. Recommend a solution that will broadcast Board meetings at zero cost to the District

Goal 1: Research pros and cons of broadcasting Board meetings

Relatively little information was found during a Google search of “broadcast school board meetings pro con,” “broadcasting public meetings pro con,” and similar searches. Two articles were found online that are germane to this goal.

Article Summary: Benefits of Broadcasting Open Meetings

The Pros and Cons of Open Meetings. (2010, June 17). Retrieved July 18, 2017, from <https://openrecords.wordpress.com/2010/06/17/the-pros-and-cons-of-open-meetings/>

This article focuses mostly on the reasons why open meetings should be broadcast. The author discusses the dangers of potential grandstanding and personal attacks during broadcast meetings. These must be tempered by firm adherence to rules and procedures. The article encourages both the live broadcasting of public meetings and the availability of video recordings online.

The article discusses three categories of positive features: “Benefits to public officials,” “Integrity of information,” and “Benefits to citizens.” These points are summarized below.

Benefits to public officials

- Accessibility improves transparency and trust

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- Meetings available in one's living room or online increases engagement with local government
 - Officials can prove their value to constituents, and can point out when and how their words/actions were taken out-of-context
 - Officials and the general public can research what was discussed previously
 - Potential reduction of FOIA requests

Integrity of information

- Videos provide quotes, color, & historical context, often missing from meeting minutes
- Voice tone & body language are evident

Benefits to citizens

- Online meetings are available to citizens on their schedules, allowing more to be fully informed

Article Summary: Board Meeting Broadcast Pro/Con

Board Meeting Broadcasts Boost Transparency. (n.d.). Retrieved July 18, 2017, from http://www.nspra.org/e_network/may_2010_leadstory

Broadcasting public meetings increases both transparency and accountability, and the public has a right to view them. Meeting broadcasts can also improve public perception when students are recognized. However, misuse ("grandstanding," "hijacking," etc.) by members or public attendees during meetings is possible, but can be overcome with clear procedural guidelines enforced by a strong chairperson. Untrue public comments made by members or attendees must be addressed by the Board or Administration quickly but carefully. Broadcasts can also be used to appeal to voters rather than make good decisions for students. Administration should be ready to respond if meeting video is taken out-of-context or edited & distributed via social media. The Board and Administration should prepare key messages and comments carefully, and research issues thoroughly in advance of each broadcast.

It is important to

- research community expectations
- discuss the pros and cons
- adapt Board policies & procedures regarding meeting protocols
- decide if and how to re-broadcast and store meeting videos
- define if and when broadcasts might require editing
- train/prepare Board members and administrators for appearance in broadcast or recorded media.

Concern

As Member Pickrel points out, school districts must comply with state and federal laws as well as parental requests to protect and preserve the anonymity of underage children. This will require our administrators to ensure that these children do not appear on camera without parental consent. Building principals keep a “Do Not Publish” list of students whose images should not be broadcast.

It is vital that:

1. each agenda clearly identify each student who will be recognized by the Board,
2. administrators must carefully preview each agenda and compare such students to their local “Do Not Publish” list, and
3. administrators must communicate with the Board prior to each board meeting so that appropriate steps can be taken to protect a child’s anonymity when necessary.

While not an insurmountable task, this will increase the expectations already placed on our building administrators. However, it is vitally important that the Board understand the responsibility of protecting student privacy in broadcast media.

It may be wise for the Board to develop a parental consent form if minor students are to appear in person or within a presentation delivered at Board meetings.

Goal 2: Research existing practices for broadcasting meetings

Summary of Input from Other Schools

Technology Director Rick Lawsha compiled data and suggestions from other schools that broadcast Board Meetings. His comments are below:

I have contacted other school districts and it seems everyone is using something different with varying degrees of success. Ideally we need 1) live streaming 2) web based archives and 3) connection to local cable TV channel 7. While live streaming is not that hard or expensive, a multi input system is needed to display not only board members and guests but also what is projected on the screen locally.

I have seen video from other events that try to use a handheld phone or iPad and it is very bad with lots of dropouts and poor resolution. In my opinion we must use high quality cameras with connection to our sound system along with a video mixer to switch between sources.

Connection to cable TV channel 7 will probably only be possible if we use the facilities at City Hall. The equipment is very expensive and the city has this connection 24 hours a day. It may not even be possible to do this from our meeting room given Comcast's desire to not expand this service.

Input from Comcast Communications

The City of Galesburg has an intergovernmental agreement with Comcast Communications to provide 2 public access channels. One channel went unused for quite some time, and the channel was deactivated in November 2016. Our contact with Comcast reports only one channel (Channel 7) remains in operation, and the City may use it as it sees fit. Currently it is used to broadcast City Council Meetings, public information, etc. The City's origination point is in City Hall.

Three things would need to happen to re-activate the other channel for educational use:

1. The City of Galesburg would have to notify Comcast in writing to request the channel be re-activated.
2. Comcast would submit to the City of Galesburg or the Board of Education a cost estimate for adding an origination point in Lincoln Education Center. Our contact estimates this would be in the range of approximately \$30,000, to include cabling, origination point, etc.
3. Installation would start after Comcast receives payment.

For questions or information, please contact Libby Stehn Tumulty at Comcast (Phone: 224-229-5295).

Tour Galesburg City Council Chambers

Rick Lawsha and Matt Jacobson contacted Orlee Lucero at Galesburg City Hall on July 11, the day after the July Board meeting, to discuss how the City of Galesburg conducts its meetings. Mr. Lucero invited us to visit and tour City Council Chambers on Friday, July 14. Assistant Superintendent Jennifer Hamm, Director for Human Resources Jon Bradburn, Rick Lawsha, and Matt Jacobson toured the facility with Mr. Lucero.

On July 11, Mr. Jacobson also asked Mr. Lucero about the possibility of hosting School Board meetings in City Council chambers and using their video system to broadcast meetings over the local Public Access Channel (Channel 7). This allowed Mr. Lucero the opportunity to discuss the idea with others at City Hall in advance of the tour. While further discussions between the Board & the City should take place regarding this idea, on July 14 Mr. Lucero seemed very positive that some sort of agreement could be worked out.

Overall, District #205 administrators were very impressed with the equipment that is currently in-use at Galesburg City Hall. District #205 Administration expressed their collective gratitude to Mr. Lucero and everyone at City Hall, and the administrators look forward to working closely with city government officials as this project progresses.

Goal 3: Find a way to broadcast Board meetings

Option A: Use personal equipment (cell phone, tripod, YouTube)

For comparison, a video test was conducted at Lincoln Education Center on July 18, 2017. That video test can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqjtmdbixIU

The video was taken with a Pixel XL Phone by Google. The audio is ambient sound picked up by the smartphone's microphones. The tripod was placed in the middle of the first row of chairs in the gallery area. This allows video of all board members, public comments, and the projection screen simply by panning the camera. The smartphone camera had to be zoomed in about 50% of its capacity in order to make facial features more evident. As with most cameras of this type, this also reduces the quality of the recorded image to some degree. Sound quality of conversations is good so long as the gallery is silent and those seated at tables & podium use their microphones appropriately. Sound quality from the workstation speakers (for videos, etc.) is poor.

Pro:

- Relatively low cost or no cost, provided the operator can attend every meeting and is willing to use of his/her private property (An Administrator's iPhone would do, too)
- Relatively quick and easy to get started

Con:

- Does not reach stakeholders who do not have Internet access
- Relies on the audio/video quality of the device used, which could vary

Given the average to poor quality of the test audio & video, this is not the best solution for an organization that wishes to maintain a professional appearance.

Option B: Use existing equipment from GHS

Member Banks suggested working with our high school's Video Production class and use their existing equipment and streaming services to broadcast Board meetings. Mr. Ullrich's plan uses a

single consumer-grade Samsung Gear VR 360-degree camera linked to a personal device (cell phone) that streams live to YouTube. <[Sample Promotional Video](#)> Mr. Ullrich will provide a wifi-only device for this purpose.

PRO:

- Cross-curricular connections (one of the Journalism advisors is willing to participate)
- Simple to use and train
- Consumer-grade equipment is becoming increasingly inexpensive

CON:

- Same sound issues as Option A, above
- Relies on a personally-owned device (Samsung cell phone, etc.)
- Coordinating coverage for scheduled meetings and special meetings can be difficult
- Student camera-person will be different every meeting, so quality may be unpredictable
- Video quality may not provide the most professional “look”
- No student classes are offered during the summer months, so alternative arrangements must be made for meetings held when school is not in session
- Broadcasting via Internet only may not reach all stakeholders (still no access to Ch. 7)

Some information to consider with this Option

Mr. Ullrich’s plan does not include supervision of high school students. After-school student project work is often unsupervised, a common practice across many high schools. If the Board decides that students’ work should be supervised during meetings by teachers, however, the Board is contractually obligated to provide financial compensation to teachers for work assigned outside of contract times, and mileage reimbursement for school-related transportation. This constitutes an ongoing annual cost. Board meetings can run anywhere from an hour to 3-4+ hours each. A brief amount of time would be needed to set up the equipment before meetings and collect the equipment for transport back to the high school. So, a teacher would need to spend anywhere from 1.5 hours to nearly 5 hours of off-contract time to broadcast each regular Board meeting. This will only increase if the Board desires to broadcast special Board meetings.

- Committee Rate = \$18.50/hour
- 12 meetings x 1.5 hours x \$18.50 = \$333 annually, plus mileage
- 12 meetings x 5 hours x \$18.50 = \$1,110 annually, plus mileage
- Mileage: 4.4 miles x 2 x 12 x \$0.535/mile (current IRS rate) = \$56.50 annually
 - If the Board chooses to broadcast special Board meetings, these figures double

The Board might consider purchasing its own 360-degree camera that is compatible with a District-owned device. The Samsung Gear 360 camera now costs less than \$200. Compatible devices include Galaxy S8, S8+ S7, S7 edge, Note5, S6 edge+, S6, S6 edge, A5/A7(2017) running Android 5.0 or later, and iPhone 7, 7+, 6S, 6S+, SE running iOS 10.0 or later. Off-contract devices can be purchased at relatively low costs and used as wifi-only devices. Further, Central Office administrators are issued compatible school-owned iPhones through our Technology Department. However, Mr. Ullrich reports that there are functional limitations when using with iOS devices.

Option C: Install professional-grade equipment

We could broadcast our Board meetings by installing all new professional-grade equipment. YouTube Live would be a free and relatively reliable video host platform. However, outfitting the existing boardroom to broadcast video would require the purchase of the following items:

- a new professional-grade video camera mounted to the wall near the current projector screen facing the board member tables,
- a 3-port video switch to allow video signals to be pushed simultaneously to the computer monitor, a projector, and to our broadcast host,
- a mixing board or switch to toggle between what the camera views and what is displayed on the PC,
- a new PC with 2 HDMI video-in ports and a video out card to process the audio/video stream,
- various cabling and connections to connect the new equipment to our existing audio system and push out the audio/video signal to our broadcast host, and
- the human cost of installing, testing, and training personnel in the use of this new equipment.

PRO:

- The board could fully control the broadcast, archiving and possible editing of the proceedings if needed.

CON:

- Broadcasting via Internet-only may not reach all stakeholders.
- A single fixed-camera setup would only allow one wide-angle view of the entire Board Member area. Panning and zooming would be unavailable without more advanced equipment to control these camera features.

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- Technology Director Rick Lawsha estimates the one-time cost for this equipment to be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$5,000, and that does not include any access to cable TV channel 7. Adding multiple or articulating cameras would also increase the cost of this option even further.

Since this option will require a cost to the District, it is offered only for comparison.

Option D: Use existing equipment from the City of Galesburg

Board meetings could simply be moved to the Galesburg City Council chambers. All video equipment needed to broadcast Board meetings is connected to our current cable provider's Public Access Channel and ready to broadcast. These videos are simultaneously recorded and posted for archiving and subsequent public access.

This concept was discussed with our Comcast contact (see above) on August 2, 2017. Ms. Stehn Tumulty said that the intergovernmental agreement would certainly allow for School Board Meetings to be broadcast over the existing public access cable channel. In her professional opinion, this broadcast communications expert described this as an "ideal situation" and a "win-win for all involved."

PRO:

- Essentially zero, but it might be nice to contribute to the cost of archiving software license
- Exhibits collaboration and partnership with the City of Galesburg
- Instant access to both equipment and broadcast host
- Broadcasting via public access television will likely reach a wider audience than Internet streaming alone.
- We could most likely use the same server as City Hall does now.
- Professional-grade location & equipment will improve public image "optics."

CON:

- Will require coordinating the schedule of Board meetings to work within City Council's needs.
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Summary of Options

	A: Cell Phone Camera	B: Student Project	C: Install Own Equipment	D: Move to City Hall
Cost Estimate	Minimal	\$0-1,200+	+/- \$5,000	\$0-1,000
Audio/Video Quality	Poor to Average, at best	Average	Average to Good	Very Good
PRO	Low cost	Engages students; 360-degree view allows viewer to choose their own angle	Greatest amount of control over broadcast & archives	Simplicity; Reaches widest audience (Internet + Television); Collaboration with City Government; Demonstrates fiscal responsibility; Highest quality broadcast using advanced equipment; Enhanced public "optics"
CON	Relies on using cellular devices; Variable quality; Reaches Internet audience only	Student operators will be different each meeting; Quality may be unpredictable; Scheduling students; Summer solution; Potential contract concerns; Reaches Internet audience only	Most expensive; Reaches Internet audience only; Reactivating our own public access channel would add an estimated \$30,000 to this project	Scheduling; Small cost

Recommendation: Test Option A, Option B, and Option D

The Board's instructions to keep costs to an absolute minimum may be achieved by using either of the cell phone-related options (standard or 360-degree cameras), but image quality and device availability should be taken into consideration. The simplicity of moving Board meetings into an environment where professional-grade cameras are already set up to stream live, archive, and broadcast live via public access should not be ignored. However, it is important to spend time reviewing the Board's procedures and expectations, and to fully-inform attendees in advance that they will be recorded and broadcast live during meetings.

These three options can be tested during Fall Semester 2017 and the Board can consider the results and decide how it wants to proceed for Spring Semester 2018 on the following schedule:

Date	September 18	October 10	November 13	December 11
Test Method	360-degree Camera	Cell Phone Camera	Move to City Hall	Compare, Discuss, & Decide

Respectfully Submitted August 2, 2017



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References

Board Meeting Broadcasts Boost Transparency. (n.d.). Retrieved July 18, 2017, from http://www.nspra.org/e_network/may_2010_leadstory

The Pros and Cons of Open Meetings. (2010, June 17). Retrieved July 18, 2017, from <https://openrecords.wordpress.com/2010/06/17/the-pros-and-cons-of-open-meetings/>