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School Nursing Associations

Restructuring for Contemporary Practice

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School nursing associations are the professional organizations that help members collaborate with each other, keep up-to-date with trends and advances within the profession, advocate the positions of the profession, and provide a place of connection with stakeholders and government entities. Participation by members in professional associations is waning across the country affecting the work they can do. The Illinois Association of School Nurses took a proactive approach to reorganize and revitalize their organization and membership.

Keywords: systems-level leadership; professionalism; standards of professional performance; nursing associations

Steadily declining membership in professional associations is a growing concern identified by many disciplines (Yohn, 2016). While associations depend on membership dues as a primary source of revenue, stagnant or declining membership challenges the sustainability of the structure and function of these organizations (Coerver & Byers, 2011). Younger and new school nurses have

different expectations that drive organizational change. Associations must function differently and even consider restructuring to allow better access to leadership, improve responsiveness, and provide answers quickly (Martin & Waxman, 2017). The following case study demonstrates the restructuring process of a state-level association and is intended to assist other associations in navigating similar issues in their state or local organizations.

Background

It was no secret to anyone on the Illinois Association of School Nurses (IASN) board that how we interact with people, organizations, our members, stakeholders, and policymakers had changed. Over several years we found ourselves having the same discussion at both the local division and state level about issues within the association. It was clear that we were all facing challenges to sustain and serve our membership and develop leadership within our association. In addition, the state-level board had become bloated, consisting of approximately 26 members, growing close to 40 with invited participants such as the NASN director and representatives to special groups.

What came from this was a small executive board formed to make decisions and the larger board met three times a year to share and discuss association matters. These board meetings represented the largest annual expense to the association and were not particularly impactful. We also knew that this was not the best use of members' dues.

At the division level, many positions were being filled with a rotation of the same active individuals, while some divisions were left without anyone to take on leadership roles. Those who had been struggling to sustain their divisions were burned out and no longer able or willing to continue. In Spring 2016, then IASN President, Mary Anne Wesoloski, urged the board to read the book *The Change Cycle: How People Can Survive and Thrive in Organizational Change* (Salerno & Brock, 2008). The conversations that developed from our reflections on this book set the stage for what came next. Everyone agreed the time had come to look at where we were in the "change cycle" on a personal and organizational level.

The desire to improve and change how IASN operated resulted in the following objectives:

1. Create a more nimble and efficient board
2. Eliminate or decrease time board members spend on administrative tasks
3. Expand leadership by identifying and mentoring members
4. Reduce operating cost for board meetings
5. Improve reach/connection to IASN members across the state

The remainder of this article is an overview of how we accomplished these objectives.

Phase 1: Survey and Communication With Membership

First, to understand membership needs and desires, several efforts were made to connect with members throughout the state. An example of connecting with our membership was a survey conducted in December 2016 using SurveyMonkey. This brief survey asked members to share information about their current and expected participation in the organization, their intent to pursue a leadership role, and their expectations about the type and availability of continuing education offerings. About 20% of the members responded to the survey.

The results revealed that members valued the listserv (87%), website (84%), and, to a certain extent, the annual and division meetings (48%, 63%, respectively). The respondents wanted to continue to receive educational offerings from the association but shared that they did not desire to travel any significant distance to attend. In terms of leadership, 46% of respondents had held a leadership position within IASN but did not intend to take on another position. Of all respondents, 80% stated they were not interested in a leadership role, while only a few expressed a desire for leadership mentoring or training.

These results were presented to the board and in January 2017 an ad hoc governance committee was created to consider the results and make recommendations to the board at the following quarterly meeting regarding

the current multidivision structure and state board composition. The committee consisted of several members of the board and all division presidents.

Phase 2: The Governance Ad Hoc Committee and Presentation of Draft Model

The ad hoc governance committee began working immediately. As a first step, each division president was approached individually to garner their viewpoint on the current IASN governance structure and their impressions about what change was needed, if any. All the division presidents expressed feeling burned out and exhausted trying to find members to fill leadership roles. Many expressed difficulties in providing continuing education programs to members.

Next, in an effort to examine best practices for modern-day associations, the ad hoc governance committee read *Race for Relevance: 5 Radical Changes for Associations* (Coerver & Byers, 2011) and then used it as a kind of self-study to structure further discussions. The book also helped inform the recommendations to the IASN board. The committee met biweekly using Google docs to capture discussions and do the work of describing how to envision the governance structure while maintaining the richest and most valued aspects of the association. Ultimately the committee made two main recommendations to the board in April 2017:

1. Effective November 2017, change current division structure into one state-wide organization.
2. Effective October 2018, reorganize the IASN board for efficiency and effectiveness.
 - Create an eight-member board supported by an administrative support person.
 - Adopt a shared governance model with the IASN member at the center.

The reimagined governance model, with the member at its center, is surrounded by the board as well as all the committees

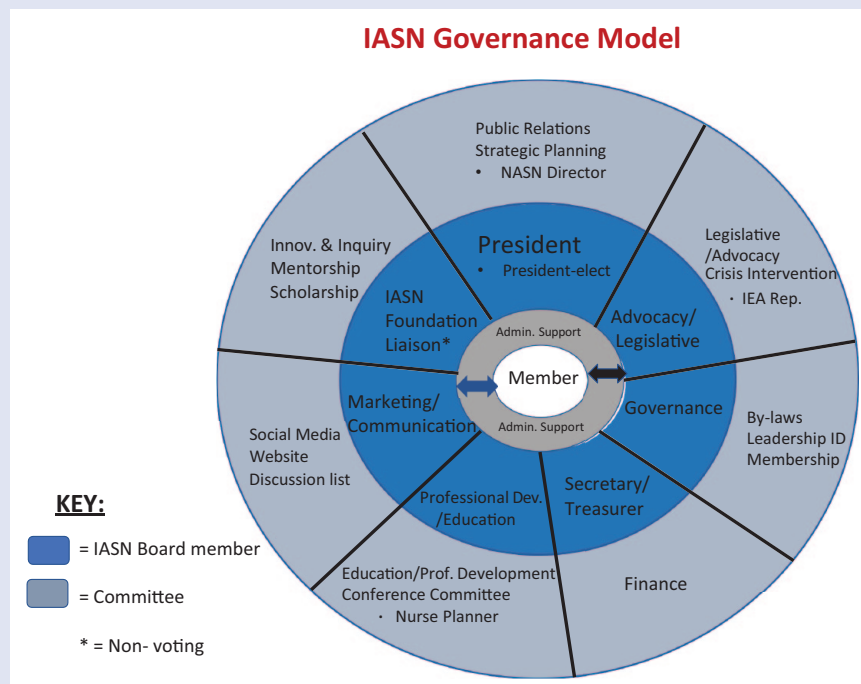
that support the board and association (see Figure 1). The members, the board, and committees are all supported by an administrator. The board consists of seven voting members, which includes the president, president-elect, secretary/treasurer, and four coordinators—advocacy/legislative, professional development/education, marketing/communications, and governance. There is one ex-officio member, the IASN Foundation Liaison, who represents the nonprofit 501(c)(3) arm of the association. These board members are reflected in the dark blue shaded area of the model. The various committees are reflected in the lighter shaded areas of the model. These committees report to the respective board member in their sector. One point of interest is that the former nominating committee is now the leadership identification committee. This change was made to better reflect the goal of the committee to encourage leaders into positions rather than “a warm body,” which was often the case in the past.

Every effort was made to communicate the ideas for the newly structured association to the members. Information was shared with members at local meetings, on the IASN Facebook page, Twitter feed (@ilschoolnurses), at four “listening tour” dates (two online and two in a face-to-face format), on the IASN website (www.iasn.org), and via our members-only discussion list on NASN SchoolNurseNet. An infographic was developed and provided a one-page summary detailing the changes (see Figure 2). It included a YouTube video link (<https://youtu.be/E9A4xauTX4o>) where the changes and the process were explained in greater detail. We encouraged members to share their questions, comments, and suggestions as we moved through this change process. It was important that the members understood the process as they would have the final word when the proposed amendments were officially presented as association bylaw changes.

Phase 3: The Transition

IASN went through several stages of bylaws changes in adopting the new

Figure 1. IASN Governance Model



Note. The various committees are reflected in the lighter shaded areas, and the board members are reflected in the dark blue shaded areas of the model. Asterisk represents nonvoting. IASN = Illinois Association of School Nurses; NASN = National Association of School Nurses.

model of governance (see time line of changes presented in Figure 3). The bylaws provide a level of accountability and are helpful in preventing or resolving conflicts and disagreements (Center for Community Health and Development, n.d.). The bylaws of IASN originally reflected how the association was organized into divisions located in different parts of the state with a “parent” state-level board and association. Similar to the old-fashioned phone tree, this structure enabled consistent messages and materials to be disseminated across the state prior to the digital age. It was clear to all that this approach no longer fit the needs of the members and was crafted in a time predating the internet.

In April 2017, following the ad hoc committee’s recommendations, the board unanimously voted to (1) dissolve the 10 divisions creating a one state-wide division/association and (2) adopt the new governance model. These changes would require an overhaul of how the association operated as well as a rewriting of the state association bylaws.

Given that this was a large undertaking, the change was done in stages to allow everyone to adapt to the new structure and governance model.

In 2018, to make as smooth a transition as possible, the current officers agreed to remain as member of the board but to be reassigned to the positions as outlined in the new governance model. Terms were staggered to prevent having the entire board turnover at the same time. This approach was used to ensure that these new roles “worked” since, prior to this, they were only titles in a model. As time went on, the role of executive secretary, a position we were finding harder and harder to fill, was eliminated from the board, and was reimagined as a support role that did not require a school nurse.

IASN made a conscious decision to hire an office support company to assist with day-to-day communications, website support, bookkeeping, and so on, rather than pay a stipend to an executive secretary. This decision has had many benefits such as a permanent address and phone number that enhances

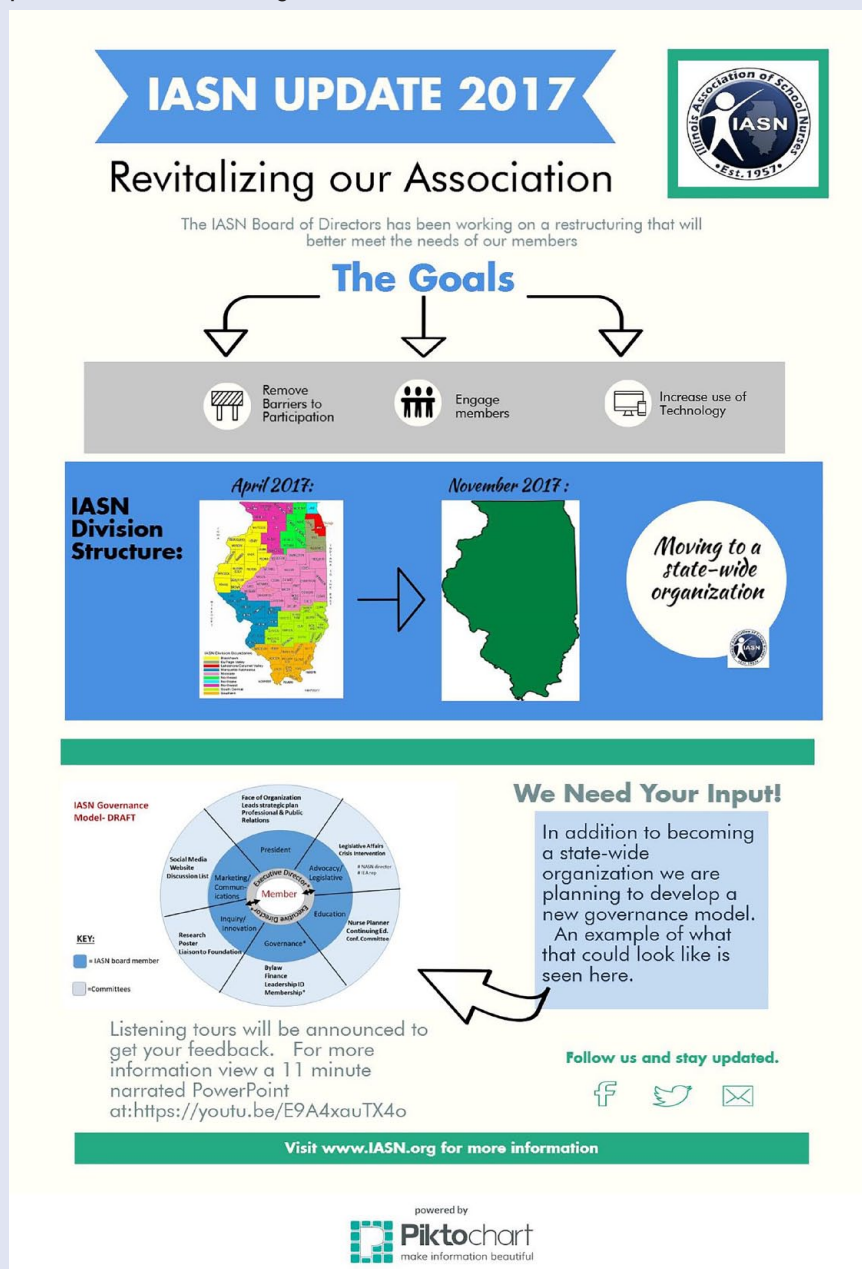
membership communications. There have also been unexpected benefits including reduced costs in budget line items such as liability insurance, and subscription services such as Zoom and SurveyMonkey as well as cloud-based file storage all provided by the office support company at no additional cost. IASN dollars go even further by working with the office support company’s preferred vendors such as conference centers, printers, and even plaque vendors.

As with most things, try as we may, we did not get all the bylaws changes in place with our first set of amendments and have had to edit them to make sure they align with the board roles and responsibilities. The bylaws have been modified two additional times, and in every instance the membership has supported the changes.

Successes and Challenges

Change is not easy nor is it neat and tidy. Early on there was some resistance to change and fear of the unknown

Figure 2. Infographic of Association Changes



Note. The various committees are reflected in the lighter shaded areas, and the board members are reflected in the dark blue shaded areas of the model. IASN = Illinois Association of School Nurses.

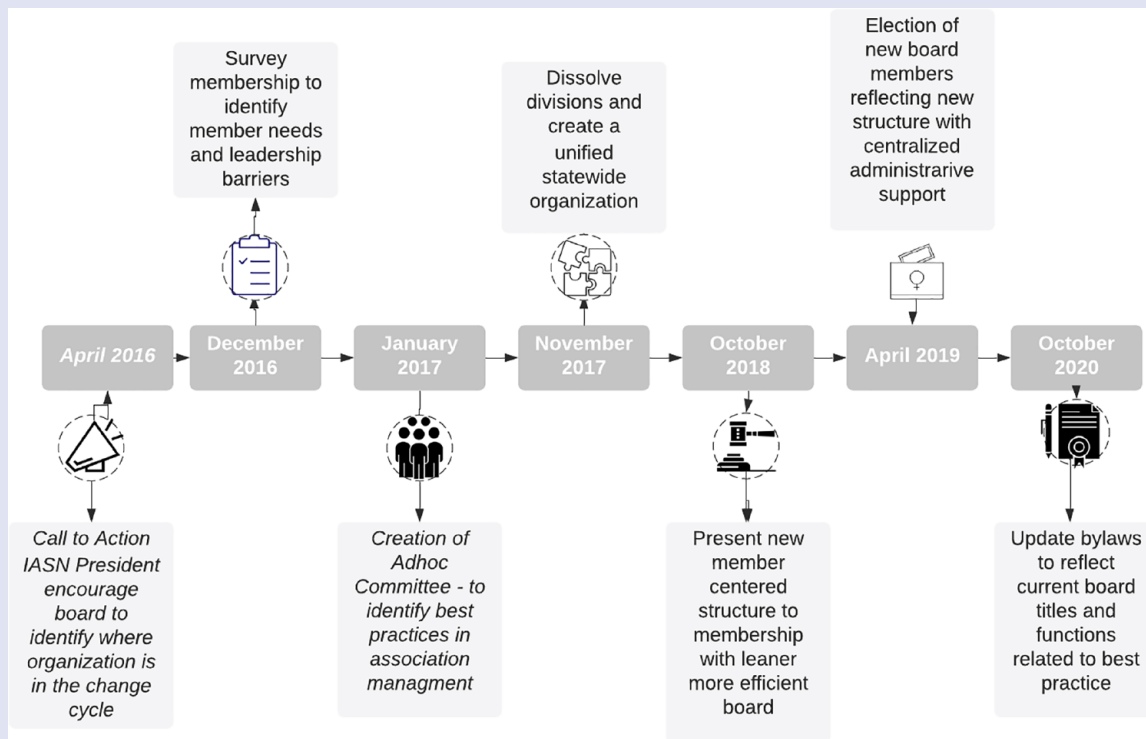
among the board and membership. How was this going to work? What is the impact from dissolving the local divisions? Will the organization be responsive to members' needs? Will there still be opportunities to serve and participate? Will the needs and concerns of members in rural areas outside

Chicago and the collar counties (where most school nurses live and work) be addressed?

The 3-year transition to a smaller, eight-member board has resulted in a nimble board able to meet more often to quickly address any issues or concerns. This was never more important

than over the last year in providing support to school nurses during COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019). Hiring administrative support has been most beneficial and has enabled IASN to seamlessly host four virtual town hall meetings as well as our annual conference, connect with members more

Figure 3. IASN Restructuring Time Line



Note. IASN = Illinois Association of School Nurses.

frequently, produce a quarterly newsletter, create a new website, and update our membership database. This model has enabled IASN to be more responsive to member needs and allowed the board to address school nurse issues rather than be bogged down with administrative ones. In addition, we anticipate the costs for board meetings will decrease by 50% to 75% as compared with the old governance structure.

A major benefit of the reorganization and bylaws update is the development of new members into leadership roles. The old model had stringent guidelines regarding who could hold a leadership position; the new structure has encouraged new members to actively serve in leadership positions. In the past 2 years, we have seen our membership grow to more than 900 members (from 621 in 2017) with new members who are younger than the average school nurse. In addition, a majority of the eight board members are school nurses who were

not on the board prior to the change. The influx of new, younger members in leadership roles has brought new ideas, approaches, and energy to our association.

The new board is committed to taking a proactive stance and connecting with members across the state. A strategic effort was made to connect with members through multiple communication modes using SurveyMonkey, exit slips, and in-person at the annual meetings and conferences. We solicit active participation from members throughout the state using Constant Contact emails, the IASN discussion list on NASN SchoolNurseNet, and our social media platforms. We have recruited members to serve in leadership roles from broad geographic regions through these same methods as well as directed personal phone calls and emails. Participation in our town halls included more than 200 school nurses at each event. Our annual meetings, live in 2019 and virtual in 2020, have had some of

the largest turnouts yet. Members from across the state are participating and looking to interact with their professional organization.

As our final, reorganization bylaw changes were made in fall 2020, we look forward knowing, that as a living organization, how we operate will always require adaptation; however, we are poised for growth and success as we move forward. Our next steps include a member survey in fall 2021 to see how we are meeting the needs of the school nurse we serve.

Phase 4: New Board, Newly Energized Association


The IASN has made the change to its new structure with some growing pains but mostly with a passion for functioning well and in the ways that serve today's school nurses. We believe the reach and connection with our members across the state has greatly improved. The change to our agile, more virtually connected board and

association could not have come at a more opportune time. We realize that while these changes were difficult, it was necessary for growth. It has allowed us to focus on *all* our members and move toward becoming a transformational board and not just a task-driven one. We feel that this new organization structure will allow consistency over time as board members join and leave the board without decreasing service to our members. We hope that sharing the reflections from our journey will assist other associations who are considering ways to address concerns and change in their own associations. While each state organization is different, we encourage you to visit our association website at www.iasn.org to view our bylaws and see what is happening with IASN. ■

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