

10 STEPS

TO LAUNCH A LIFEWISE



STEP 6: OBTAIN SCHOOL APPROVAL

Preparation, Scheduling and Resources for Meetings with School Officials

Purpose

To introduce the concept of LifeWise to school administrators and request written acknowledgement to move forward with the logistical plan. Each Steering Committee will want to work alongside their Program Coach to understand and plan best practices prior to reaching out to school officials.

Understanding School Administration Levels

- ◆ Superintendent: Normally the primary point person for the decision
- ◆ Principal: Handles the scheduling component and can have a strong voice in the discussion and decision
- ◆ Teachers: Usually not part of the decision-making process but sometimes have a voice
- ◆ Board of Education
 - ◇ Is there a school board policy in place? If not, the board may need to adopt one
 - ◇ Ask your Program Coach to supply sample policy if the board needs to adopt one

Preparing for the Superintendent Meeting

- ◆ Discuss meeting details and do's and don'ts with your Program Coach
 - ◇ Don't be demanding, combative or political
 - ◇ Do stay positive—we are here to serve and “come alongside” the school
 - ◇ Do focus on student and school benefits—LifeWise meets the felt need for character education, mental health, academic performance and engagement with religious families who might otherwise opt out of public school
- ◆ Determine your state's released time law by using the [State Released Time Laws Map](#). [Navigating Released Time Laws](#) will help your team prepare accordingly.
 - ◇ If the school board already has a released time policy in place, we are asking to make use of the school policy
- ◆ Have a well-defined logistical plan to present
- ◆ Consider the school calendar and when the schedule for the following school year is set
- ◆ Determine who will attend the superintendent meeting
 - ◇ Typically 2-3 Steering Committee members and 1-2 LifeWise representatives (optional)
- ◆ Review the [What Educators Need to Know](#) brochure and [School Officials FAQ](#) to be familiar with the general information that will be communicated to school officials
- ◆ After the superintendent meeting is scheduled, the LifeWise Support Center will provide your chairperson with packets to be presented during your meeting

Setting Up the Superintendent Meeting

Work with your Program Coach to determine who will contact the superintendent to set up the meeting using the following templates. Include your Program Coach for official meetings and on all communications.

- ◆ Template email to contact superintendent [HERE](#)
- ◆ Phone script to contact district office [HERE](#)
 - ◇ Template email to follow up with superintendent (after call to district office) [HERE](#)

Outline for the Superintendent Meeting

- ◆ **Steering Committee Spokesperson**
 - ◇ Open with a thank-you to administrators for the meeting and for their hard work in the school district
 - ◇ Introduce those in attendance and state the purpose to coordinate with the school to utilize released time religious instruction through LifeWise Academy
 - ◇ Tell your story of learning about LifeWise and the process up to this point
- ◆ **LifeWise Representative or Committee Spokesperson**

*Video from LifeWise CEO Joel Penton can be used if a LifeWise Representative is not available. Your Program Coach will provide you with the video as needed.

 - ◇ Explain the concept and history of released time
 - ◇ Briefly walk through the history of LifeWise
 - ◇ Share a quick overview of the benefits and impact of LifeWise
 - ◇ Present the administrators with the packet and explain contents
 - Community Interest List
 - Released time policy (if applicable)
 - ◇ Mention if their school has its own released time policy
- ◆ **Steering Committee Spokesperson**
 - ◇ Share the Logistical Plan
 - Target school, transportation/location
 - Target timeline for approval
 - Other contents
 - ◇ Ask if there are any questions
- ◆ **LifeWise Representative or Committee Spokesperson**
 - ◇ Ask for specific next steps to continue moving forward and the need for a point of contact/liaison
 - ◇ Let the superintendent know that an email will be sent with a copy-and-paste acknowledgement letter to be placed onto the school district letterhead to sign and return

After the Superintendent Meeting

Next steps after the superintendent meeting vary depending upon the response of the superintendent. Refer to the examples below for next steps.

- ◆ Example #1:
 - ◇ Superintendent acknowledges released time law at a federal, state or local level and affirms your team's intention to reach out to and meet with building principals to discuss possible schedules

- ❖ Superintendent is willing to provide an “acknowledgement letter” to the team within one to two weeks
 - ❖ Next steps: Steering Committee can begin focusing on identifying a Program Director
- ◆ Example #2:
 - ❖ Superintendent requests that your team share a formal presentation with the Board of Education
 - ❖ Next steps: Steering Committee connects with Program Coach to prepare for the Board of Education presentation
- ◆ Example #3:
 - ❖ Superintendent raises concerns and is unwilling to move forward with the proposed plan
 - ❖ Next steps: Steering Committee offers solutions to the concerns raised. Potential solutions include offering a tour of a live program or encouraging school administrators to connect with school officials from districts with an existing LifeWise program.

After the superintendent meeting, send a follow-up email to say thank you, clarify next steps, provide additional information and answer questions or concerns that were brought up. It’s also a good idea to update your Community Interest List of the progress that was made.

- ◆ Template email to superintendent after the meeting requesting acknowledgement letter [HERE](#)
- ◆ Template email to your CIL if response was positive [HERE](#)
- ◆ Template email to your CIL if your superintendent desires more time [HERE](#)

**Note: All texts, emails and phone logs to a school official are considered “public record” and can be requested from the public at any time for review. No matter how well you know the school officials, keep your communications professional, knowing others could review them.*

Addressing the Board of Education

In the event a superintendent requests that your team present details on LifeWise to the local Board of Education, you will want to schedule a meeting with your assigned Program Coach to discuss available resources, talking points and steps for preparation.

Prior to presenting to your board, it is helpful to clarify with your superintendent what he/she would like you to address with the board. Some superintendents will share initial details regarding released time and LifeWise with their board members. If there is initial feedback from the board, it can be helpful to ask for this so your team can provide specific answers to questions they have.

Preparing for the Board of Education Presentation

Resources that can be reviewed and/or used during the presentation to the school board:

- ◆ [Step 6: Board of Education Sample Talking Points](#)
- ◆ [What Educators Need to Know](#)
- ◆ [For Educators](#) (information and videos)
- ◆ [School Officials FAQs](#)
- ◆ [LifeWise School Board Presentation](#) (make a copy and edit)

Presenting to the Board of Education

There are typically three ways information around released time and LifeWise can be presented to board members:

Board Work Session

- ◆ Board members typically get together twice a month, first for a work session and second for a board meeting
- ◆ The work session is often open to the public but can also be a private session where board members prepare for the upcoming board meeting. The work session is intended as a time to prepare for the decisions that will officially be made during the board meeting.
- ◆ If your team is asked to present during a work session, it has to be at the request of the superintendent or board president
- ◆ Should your team be asked to join a work session, it is recommended that you decide on having one to two main presenters and possibly two or three others be available to share personal testimonials on why they are excited for LifeWise

Board Meeting Agenda Item

- ◆ During board meetings, there is an opportunity for your team to formally share. In order to do this, the superintendent or board president must place you on the meeting agenda as a formal discussion item.
- ◆ Once you are placed on the agenda, you will typically have 15 to 20 minutes to present, along with the opportunity for board members to ask questions
- ◆ Like the work session, we recommend having one to two main presenters along with two to three community members willing to share their desire for LifeWise
- ◆ Additional presenters could be local business owners with good community rapport, parents of students in the school or area church leaders

Board Meeting Public Participation

- ◆ Board policies often state there is a specified time during board meetings for public participation
- ◆ Be sure to check your school's policy handbook under "public participation" or reach out to the school office to find out how you can speak during a board meeting
- ◆ Often, those seeking to speak during a school board meeting will have to either contact the district office and request to speak or arrive at your board meeting early and fill out the sign-in sheet
- ◆ Speakers during public participation are typically limited to 3-5 minutes of speaking time depending on the district
- ◆ The board is not able to answer any direct questions during public participation
- ◆ For sample talking points, see [Step 6: Board of Education Sample Talking Points](#)
- ◆ The main goal of using public participation is to show the board that there is overwhelming support for released time and LifeWise in the district
- ◆ The more people in attendance at the meeting in support of LifeWise, the better
- ◆ Be sure to coordinate your speakers and their content as much as possible

Next Steps

Follow-Up

After any official school meetings, it can be helpful to send a follow-up email to say thank you, clarify next steps, provide any additional information and answer questions or concerns that were brought up. It's also beneficial to update your Community Interest List of the progress that was made.

- ◆ Template email to Superintendent after School Board Meeting if response was positive [HERE](#)
- ◆ Template email to Superintendent after School Board Meeting if they need more time [HERE](#)
- ◆ Template email to your CIL if response was positive [HERE](#)
- ◆ Template email to your CIL if your school board needs more time [HERE](#)

Additional Requests

There are times when school boards and administrative staff members ask for local Steering Committees to provide additional documentation prior to moving forward. Some “asks” have included surveying parents with students in the school, visiting a live LifeWise program or having a formal presentation done for some of the school staff. While none of these requests are necessary in regard to offering a released time program, it can be important to demonstrate to the district a desire to come alongside and work through these details.

Contacting the School Board

In certain circumstances, it can be helpful to email and call those who have signed the CIL to action by encouraging them to contact the local school board to show support for released time religious instruction utilizing LifeWise. The following resources are intended for communities to show their school boards mass support for the use of released time through a LifeWise program. Each document lays out a specific “ask” of school board members.

- ◆ [Contact Your School Board \(NO Released Time Policy in place\)](#)
 - ◇ Asks the School Board to read, vote on and adopt a released time policy
- ◆ [Contact Your School Board \(Released Time Policy in place\)](#)
 - ◇ Calls the board’s attention to the released time policy already in place which allows parents to utilize it as an option for their student(s)

Moving Slow

It is important to remain patient during this part of the process. It may take several days or weeks to hear back from school officials, and that’s okay. School schedules can often be filled with preparing for Christmas, Spring break, state testing or professional development. A respectful reminder email can go a long way.

- ◆ Although released time has been around since the 1950s, it can still feel like a new thing. With any new thing, school officials need time to consider how it will impact the students and community.
- ◆ While you wait, consider ways to ensure that school officials are confident in your team’s desire to come alongside and serve the district