



New Hampshire School Boards Association
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Roles and Responsibilities for New Hampshire School Boards

I. Introduction

School boards have numerous responsibilities, have to answer to a variety of constituent interests and must navigate through a myriad of federal laws, state statutes and administrative regulations, all while focusing on the primary objective of enhancing and supporting student achievement.

A fundamental rule is that individual board members have NO AUTHORITY beyond that exercised in a board meeting/non-meeting conforming to the requirements of RSA 91-A, the New Hampshire Right to Know law. When the meeting is called to order each member is empowered with the right to vote on each issue. When the meeting is adjourned, that power is gone. Only a majority of the board has the ability to set policy, propose budgets, negotiate contracts or make requests of the superintendent. The only employee over whom the board has supervision is the superintendent. The board may empower a single member, the chair or subcommittee to take action outside of the board meeting, but such power is only given by the full board.

Under the legal framework, the school board governs the district, while the Superintendent manages it. A useful refrain capturing the board's function is that *the role of a school board is not to run the schools, but to see that they are run well.*

The board and superintendent form the school district leadership team. The effective functioning of this team requires trust. It does NOT mean everyone agrees on the issues. In fact, a well-functioning team with a high level of trust will have vigorous discussions over issues they care greatly about. Trust also means that board decisions will be respected by all board members. To do otherwise reduces team effectiveness.

These materials provide an overview of the general responsibilities of school boards under New Hampshire statutes and regulations, a glimpse of how those responsibilities relate to legal responsibilities and functions of superintendents, and some best practice guidelines for effective school district governance. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive listing of every legal requirement school boards must fulfill. Rather, NHSBA provides this document with the goal of informing its members and the public of what some of the legal requirements are and how established best practices within those roles and responsibilities and can augment effective school board governance.

II. Key Roles and Responsibilities of School Boards – State Statutes, NHDOE Rules.

RSA 189:1-a, I articulates the primary responsibility of school boards:

It shall be the duty of the school board to provide, at district expense, elementary and secondary education to all pupils who reside in the district until such time as the pupil has acquired a high school diploma or has reached age 21...

A. Set and Establish School Board Policy.

School boards are required to abide by and implement numerous statutes, rules and regulations. Many state statutes and NHDOE regulations require school boards to adopt policies. NHSBA advocates that the development of clear, sound and legal policies is critical to the successful operation of any school district and that adopting policy is among the most fundamental responsibilities of any board of education. Policy is the tool that provides the Board power to allow or require action. It is through policy that boards can govern effectively. The board is a policy-making body and its policies are the local law of the district.

Legal Requirements Pertaining to School Board Policy.

In addition to putting policy-making at the forefront of your school board's responsibilities, there is sufficient legal basis to indicate that school boards are primarily policy-making bodies. For example, many of the NHDOE regulations relative to the duties of school boards indicate that the Board has numerous policy-making responsibilities.

- (1) **NHDOE Rule Ed 303 – Duties of School Boards.** Ed 303.01, Substantive Duties. Each school board shall: [*Compare to Superintendent's duties – page 7*]
 - Ed 303.01(a) – Adopt policies necessary and desirable to control and effectuate the recruitment, employment, evaluation and dismissal of teachers and other employees.
 - Ed 303.01(b) – Adopt policies necessary and desirable to control and effectuate the purchase of equipment, supplies, or services.
 - Ed 303.01(i) – Adopt a rule to ensure that there shall be no unlawful discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age, creed, color, marital status, national origin, or disability.
 - NHDOE Rule Ed 306.04(a) – Minimum Standards for Public School Approval: “In accordance with Ed 303.01, the local school board shall adopt and implement written policies and procedures relative to...”. ED 306.04 lists 26 policies that are required by law.

- (2) **Various NH Statutes (RSAs) Require School Board Policies.**

In addition to the NHDOE Rules, numerous New Hampshire statutes (known as RSAs) also require school boards to adopt a variety of policies on a multitude of topics. It is important to note that this list seems to grow longer each year.

Examples of policies required by New Hampshire include:

- Bullying (RSA 193-F)
- Concussions (RSA 200:49)
- Use of restraints (RSA 126-U)
- Truancy/absenteeism (RSA 189:34)
- Background checks (RSA 189:13-a)
- Objectionable course material (RSA 186:11)
- School lunch payments (RSA 189:11-a)
- Health and sex education (RSA 186:11)
- Non-academic surveys (RSA 186:11)
- Manifest educational hardship (RSA 193:3)

B. Establish the School District's Budget and Provide Budget Oversight.

While budget approval is ultimately left to the voters (or, in more legal terms, the “legislative body”) one of the most vital aspects of school board roles and responsibilities is the development of a budget that serves the needs to students while simultaneously respecting the ability of tax payers to fund such a system. As state-aid to public education remains either stagnant or is eliminated, the burden on local property taxpayers continues to rise.

The legal bases for a school board’s budget and fiscal responsibilities are found in the following New Hampshire statutes and NHDOE Rules.

- RSA 32:5 – Budget Preparation
- RSA 32:8 – Limitation on Expenditures
- RSA 32:10 – Transfer of Appropriations
- RSA 197:23-a – Treasurer’s Duties; board authorized to make payments
- RSA 40:13, IX(b) – Default Budget
- NHDOE Rule Ed 303.01(e) – Prepare an annual budget
- NH Department of Revenue Administration Rule Rev 1100 - Financial Source Coding For Local Educational Agencies

C. Hire a Superintendent - (RSA 194-C).

The superintendent is the school district’s educational leader and is charged with the oversight of all aspects of the District’s daily functions. The responsibility of hiring the superintendent rests with the SAU board, per RSA 194-C:4.

- RSA 194-C:4. Each school administrative unit or single school district shall provide the following superintendent services...

Nothing in New Hampshire law addresses how school boards must hire a superintendent or what process must be used. Processes for hiring a new superintendent vary greatly from school district to school district, with each school board employing its own unique method. Some Boards use community-wide committees while others use a sub-committee of the

board and engage public input through other means such as forums, electronic surveys, and meeting with various constituency groups.

D. Evaluate the Superintendent - (Ed 303; contract; local policy).

School boards have a legal obligation to conduct an annual evaluation of the superintendent. Not only is an annual evaluation a best practice, it is also legally required. There are generally three sources of law that obligate the school board to evaluate the superintendent:

- NHDOE Rule Ed 303.01(k). School boards shall annually evaluate the superintendent based on written criteria established by the school board(s)/SAU board.
- School board policy. (NHSBA Sample Policy CBI).
- An obligation to conduct an annual evaluation is almost always found in most superintendent contracts.

E. Conduct Hearings and Serve as an Adjudicative Body (Various statutes/rules).

From time to time, school boards must conduct adjudicative hearings relative to the rights of students or employees. The source of these rights varies – some are established via state or federal statute while others are the product of NHDOE Rules. Others have their roots in Constitutional due process requirements. Also, local collective bargaining agreements and/or school board policies may grant students or staff a right to a hearing.

Some examples may include:

Parents & Students

- Manifest Educational Hardship (RSA 193:3)
- Long-term Suspensions and Expulsions (RSA 193:13; NHDOE Rule 317)
- Discrimination/Sexual Harassment Policy
- Transportation/Bus Removal (local board policy)
- Bullying (RSA 193-F)
- Residency (RSA 193:12)
- Early Admission to First Grade (local board policy)
- Curriculum (local board policy)

Employees

- Dismissals (RSA 189:13)
- Non-renewals (RSA 189:14-a)
- Labor/Grievances (local collective bargaining agreements)

Be Mindful of Your Role as a School Board Member – *Quasi Judicial* Function.

Because the school board may need to sit as “judge and jury” for these hearings, it is important that individual Board members, as well as the Board as a whole, not be privy to specific information prior to the hearing.

This is a very difficult position for Board members, who, as stewards of the school district, feel an obligation and responsibility to the public to be informed about such matters. If and when such a situation does arise, NHSBA recommends that school boards consult fully with their local legal counsel for a full analysis and legal opinion as to the Board's course of action and dissemination of information.

F. Collective Bargaining - (RSA 273-A).

Most districts have staff who belong to a "collective bargaining unit" (i.e., union), with some districts having as many as 5 unions (teachers, support staff, custodians, etc.). RSA 273-A:3, I states "It is the obligation of the public employer (school board) and the employee organization (teachers' union/other union) certified by the board as the exclusive representative of the bargaining unit to negotiate in good faith."

"Good faith" bargaining, at its most basic, means "meeting at reasonable times and places in an effort to reach agreement on the terms of employment, and to cooperate in mediation and fact-finding required by this chapter, but the obligation to negotiate in good faith shall not compel either party to agree to a proposal or to make a concession." (RSA 273-A:3, I).

G. Communicate with the public – keep the public informed of Board actions.

Both the New Hampshire Constitution and RSA 91-A, the Right to Know law, demand Openness in the conduct of public business is essential to a democratic society. As most Board members know, the Right to Know law has numerous provisions outlining various requirements for posting notice of public meetings, making meetings open to the public, and providing the public with access to minutes and other public records in a timely manner.

In addition to the Right to Know law requirements, many Boards and administrators undertake efforts to keep the public informed of school board action and school district events.

Pertinent provisions of the Right to Know law:

- RSA 91-A:1-a, VI – definition of "public body"
- RSA 91-A:2 – Meetings Open to Public
- RSA 91-A:3 – Nonpublic Sessions

H. Strategic Planning – Long and Short-Term Goals, Plans and Objectives.

NHSBA advocates that strategic planning is a vital component of school board governance. NHDOE Rule 303.01(g) imposes upon boards the duty to "develop long-range plans and identify measurable and attainable short-term objectives". A comprehensive strategic plan will help the school board and the District:

- Clarify the Board's and the District's goals and direction.
- Identify effective aspects of Board performance.

- Effectively plan for the learning opportunities for students.
- Address areas that are in need of improvement.
- Help address budgetary needs.
- Help address facilities needs.
- Provide long-term sustainability for the Board, staff and community.

III. The Learning Curve for New School Board Members.

Individuals run for school board for many reasons – some because they have children in school, others because they have a background in education. Some people run for office out of a desire to give back to their community, while others run for office for more specific or purposes.

Regardless, the learning curve for new school board members can be steep. NHSBA offers the following recommended best practices:

- Learn to acknowledge publicly that individual Board members have no power or authority to act on behalf of the Board or the District. Only the Board, as a whole and at a properly noticed meeting, can make decisions or take action for the school district.
- Determine what your function is on the school board and how to accomplish it effectively.
- Even though you may have attended numerous Board meetings as a private citizen, there is still a lot to learn once you're elected to the school board.
- Recognize the difference between setting policy (the Board's job) and administering the schools (the superintendent's job).
- Board members must represent students, first. Board members have numerous constituencies – parents, staff, taxpayers, and so forth. And at times, the interests or desires of those constituencies may be divergent. However, the first consideration of all Board decisions should consider what is in the best interest of students. The primary focus of all Board decisions must be student achievement.
- Learn how to respond to the complaints and concerns of citizens, school administrators, and other staff. Most school boards have local policies that establish a “reporting” structure when members of the community have complaints or grievances. Be sure to follow that policy.
- Remember and respect that change comes slowly.
- Individual Board members can't solve problems by themselves – it takes the work of the entire Board to reach consensus and achieve solutions.
- See the pertinent NHSBA Sample Policies (attached):
 - BBAA – School Board Member Authority
 - BBAB – Roles and Duties of the Board Chairperson
 - BCA – School Board Member Ethics
 - BEAB – Board Member Use of Electronic Communication Devices During School Board Meetings
 - BHC – Board-Employee Communications
 - KE – Public Complaints

- KEB – Public Complaints About School Personnel

IV. The Superintendent’s Role.

Just as various statutes and administrative rules establish what a school board’s role and responsibility is, there is a co-extensive, yet distinct, series of statutes and rules that guide what the roles and responsibilities of school superintendents.

A. Implement School Board Policy.

The pertinent NHDOE Rules relative to the duties of the superintendent indicate that the superintendent is responsible for implementing school board policy. A few examples follow.

NHDOE Rule Ed 302.02 – Substantive Duties of Superintendents.

- Ed 302.02(a) – Nominate all certified staff and appoint other employees in accordance with state law, the rules of the state board and school board policies.
- Ed 302.02(b) - Direct and supervise the work of all employees of the district or districts within the school administrative unit and shall have all powers necessary to make such direction effective, as outlined in RSA 194-C:4. While the superintendent has ultimate responsibility, he/she may delegate powers and duties to other personnel.
- Ed 302.02(d) – Be responsible for developing and recommending to the school board or boards within the school administrative unit the annual budget for the support of the educational program and for the operation and maintenance of schools within the district or districts and the school administrative unit in accordance with school board policy.
- Ed 302.02(e) – Be responsible for developing and maintaining an accounting system and financial reporting procedures for all funds in accordance with local school board policy, and local and state laws.
- Ed 302.02(f) – Be responsible for the development of an educational plan including curriculum, instruction, and assessment programs for the district or districts and for recommending a program of studies suitable to the needs of the pupils and the community in accordance with local school board policies, state statutes and state board rules.
- Ed 302.02(r) – Be responsible for the implementation and review of school district policies.

As these Rules listed above indicate, and in conjunction with the Rules relative to school board duties and responsibilities covered in earlier pages, the school board adopts policy and the superintendent implements Board policy.

B. Nominate Professional Staff (RSA 189:39; RSA 189:14-a; NHDOE Rule 302).

- RSA 189:39 - Superintendents shall nominate and school boards elect all teachers employed in the schools in their school administrative unit, providing such teachers hold a valid educational credential issued by the state board of education.
- Ed 302.02(a) – The superintendent shall...Nominate all certified staff and appoint other employees in accordance with state law, the rules of the state board and school board policies.

C. Provide Superintendent Services - RSA 194-C:4.

Each NHDOE Rule has a corresponding statute that give rise to the authorization for the administrative rule itself. In addition to the NHDOE Rules relative to superintendent duties, RSA 194-C:4 provides a comprehensive list of the areas of school district operations that are the responsibility of the superintendent. NHSBA has sample policies that school boards have policies that address most of these subject areas.

RSA 194-C:4.: Each school administrative unit or single school district shall provide the following superintendent services:

- II. Governance, organizational structure, and implementation of administrative services including, but not limited to:*
- (a) Payroll, cash flow, bills, records and files, accounts, reporting requirements, funds management, audits, and coordination with the treasurer, and advisory boards on policies necessary for compliance with all state and federal laws regarding purchasing.*
 - (b) Recruitment, supervision, and evaluation of staff; labor contract negotiation support and the processing of grievances; arrangement for mediation, fact finding, or arbitration; and management of all employee benefits and procedural requirements.*
 - (c) Development, review, and evaluation of curriculum, coordination of the implementation of various curricula, provisions of staff training and professional development, and development and recommendation of policies and practices necessary for compliance relating to curriculum and instruction.*
 - (d) Compliance with laws, regulations, and rules regarding special education, Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act, home education, minimum standards, student records, sexual harassment, and other matters as may from time to time occur.*
 - (e) Pupil achievement assessment through grading and state and national assessment procedures and the methods of assessment to be used.*
 - (f) The on-going assessment of district needs relating to student population, program facilities and regulations.*
 - (g) Writing, receiving, disbursement, and the meeting of all federal, state, and local compliance requirements.*

- (h) Oversight of the provision of insurance, appropriate hearings, litigation, and court issues.*
- (i) School board operations and the relationship between the Board and the District administration.*
- (j) The daily administration and provision of educational services to students at the school facility including, but not limited to, fiscal affairs; staff, student, and parent safety and building issues; and dealing with citizens at large.*
- (k) Assignment, usage, and maintenance of administrative and school facilities.*
- (l) Designation of number, grade or age levels and, as applicable, other information about students to be served.*
- (m) Pupil governance and discipline, including age-appropriate due process procedures.*
- (n) Administrative staffing.*
- (o) Pupil transportation.*
- (p) Annual budget, inclusive of all sources of funding.*
- (q) School calendar arrangements and the number and duration of days pupils are to be served pursuant to RSA 189:1.*
- (r) Identification of consultants to be used for various services.*

NHSBA Practice Pointer: Note the similarities between a school board's policy requirements (budget, staff, curriculum, etc.) and the superintendent's duties. There is a clear link between school board policies and the day-to-day obligations of the superintendent.

Remember – the Board adopts policies and the superintendent implements those policies. The Board holds the superintendent responsible via the superintendent's evaluation.

Questions from parents/public as to the implementation of a policy should be directed to the administration. Questions about the contents or language of a policy are within the Board's purview.

Roles & Responsibilities of School Boards and Superintendents



<u>Roles/Responsibilities</u>	<u>School Board</u>	<u>Superintendent</u>
1. General	Governs the District	Advises the Board – Manages the District
2. Policy	Adopts	Suggests and Implements
3. Board Meetings	In charge of	Serves as resource
4. Budget/Finance/Audits	Adopts and monitors	Prepares, administers, monitors, details
5. Instruction/Curriculum	Establishes criteria, approves, and monitors	Recommends, oversees staffs' efforts
6. Personnel	Establishes criteria, approves, or rejects	Interviews, recommends, hires, evaluates, promotes, trains
7. Community Relations	Creates a positive image for district	Creates a positive image for district, directs communications
8. Labor Relations	Provides guidelines, ratifies contracts	Monitors process within guidelines
9. Student Services	Adopts policies for care and control	Recommends, implements, directs
10. Facilities/Food Service /Transportation	Develops policy on use of	Implements policy, writes procedures, makes recommendations

Roles and Responsibilities of School Boards and Superintendents | Provided by the Idaho School Boards Association

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NHSBA SELECTED GOVERNANCE POLICIES

Sample Policy BBAA SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER AUTHORITY

Category: Recommended

The authority of individual Board members is limited to participating in actions taken by the Board as a whole when legally in session. Board members shall not assume responsibilities of administrators or other staff members. The Board or staff shall not be bound in any way by any action taken or statement made by any individual Board member except when such statement or action is pursuant to specific instructions and official action taken by the Board.

Each Board member shall review the agenda and any study materials distributed prior to the meeting and be prepared to participate in the discussion and decision-making for each agenda item. Each agenda will provide an opportunity for Board members to comment on District activities and/or educational issues. These comments may become topics for future Board discussions.

Board members may occasionally serve on committees or organizations for the purpose of reciprocal communication and reporting back to the Board. Committee assignments will be made by the Chairperson with Board approval.

Each member is obligated to attend Board meetings regularly. Whenever possible, each Board member shall give advance notice to the Chairperson or Superintendent of his/her inability to attend a Board meeting.

Legal references:

RSA 91-A:2, Meetings Open to Public

RSA 91-A:2-a, Communication Outside Meetings

N.H. Code of Administrative Rules-Section Ed. 303.01, Substantive Duties of School Boards

Appendix: BBA-R

Revised: April 2011, July 1998, November 1999. February 2004

Sample Policy BBAB ROLES AND DUTIES OF THE BOARD CHAIRPERSON

Category: Optional

Duties of the Chairperson

The Chairperson shall preside at all meetings of the Board and shall perform other duties as directed by law, New Hampshire Department of Education rules, and by this Board. In carrying out these responsibilities, the Chairperson shall:

1. Sign the instruments, acts, and orders necessary to carry out state requirements and the will of the Board;
2. Consult with the Superintendent in the planning of the Board meeting agendas;
3. Confer with the Superintendent on crucial matters that may occur between Board meetings;

4. Appoint members to serve on specific committees, subject to full Board approval;
5. Call emergency meetings of the Board as necessary;
6. Be the public spokesperson for the Board at all times except as this responsibility is specifically delegated to others; and
7. Preside at and be responsible for the orderly conduct of all Board meetings.

As presiding officer at all meetings of the Board, the Chairperson shall:

1. Call the meeting to order at the appointed time;
2. Announce the business to come before the Board in its proper order;
3. Enforce the Board's policies relating to the order of business and the conduct of meetings;
4. Put motions to a vote and announce the vote result.

The Chairperson shall have the right, as other Board members have, to offer motions, discuss questions, and vote.

Duties of the Vice-Chairperson

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair shall perform all the duties of the Chair.

New Sample Policy: April 2011

Sample Policy BCA SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER ETHICS

Category: Recommended

In order to fulfill its duty under state law to provide education to pupils within the District, the Board adopts the following expectations for each of its members.

AS A MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL BOARD, AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH MY OATH OF OFFICE, I WILL STRIVE TO IMPROVE PUBLIC EDUCATION BY STRIVING TO ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING EXPECTATIONS:

1. Attend all regularly scheduled Board meetings, insofar as possible, and become informed concerning issues to be considered at those meetings.
2. Understand that the Board, as governing body, does not manage the District, but rather sets the broad goals and standards for the District by way of policies adopted by a quorum of the Board at proper meetings under the Right-to-Know law.
3. Be informed about current educational issues by individual study and through information, such as those sponsored by my state and national school board associations.
4. Make decisions and take votes based upon the available facts, the full deliberation of the Board, and my independent judgment, and refuse to surrender or subordinate that judgement to any individual or special interest group.

5. Work respectfully with other Board members by encouraging the free expression of differing opinions and ideas.
6. Seek opportunities for the Board to establish systematic communication channels with students, staff, and members of the community.
7. Recognize that as a general principle the District and its students benefit when Board decisions, which have been made following consideration of all sides and vote of a quorum, receive the subsequent support of the whole Board, whenever practicable.
8. Respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law or is received in confidence or non-public session.
9. Recognize that individual Board members are without authority to act relative to School District business, and that I may not individually commit the Board to any action except as specifically designated to do so by Board action.
10. Understand the chain of command and refer problems or complaints to the proper administrative office per applicable School Board policies.
11. Work with the other Board members to establish effective Board policies, and foster a relationship with the District administration toward the effective implementation of those policies and management of the District operations, personnel and facilities.
12. Communicate to the Superintendent and to the Board (only as consistent with the Right-to-Know law) expressions of public reaction to Board programs, policies and other Board actions.
13. Present personal criticisms concerning District operations, staff, etc. to the Superintendent, not to District staff, the public, or unnecessarily at a Board meeting.
14. Establish policies and protocols for systematic communications with students, staff, and members of the community. Support the employment of those persons best qualified to serve as school staff, and insist on a regular and impartial evaluation of all staff.

Revised: May 2018, November 1999, May 2006

Sample Policy BEDH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD MEETINGS

Category: Recommended

Related Policies: BEDB, KE & KEB

The primary purpose of School Board meetings is to conduct the business of the Board as it relates to school policies, programs and operations. The Board encourages residents to attend Board meetings so that they may become acquainted with the operation and programs of the schools. All official meetings of the Board shall be open to the press and public. However, the Board reserves the right to meet and to adjourn or recess a meeting at any time. The Board also reserves the right to enter non-public session at any time, in accordance with the provisions RSA 91-A:3.

In order to assure that persons who wish to appear before the Board may be heard and, at the same time, assure that the Board may conduct its business and meetings properly and efficiently, the Board adopts as policy the following procedures and rules pertaining to public participation at Board meetings.

Rules of Order

1. The Board will provide a maximum of ___*fifteen* minutes to hear public comments at the beginning of each regular Board meeting. This period may be extended by a majority vote of the Board. Additionally, the Board may include additional public comment period for specific agenda items with a time limit for public comment specified on the pertinent agenda.
2. Individual speakers will be allotted ___*three* minutes per person. Speakers may not relinquish allotted time to another speaker. For specific meetings and/or specific agenda items, the Board may at the outset of the public comment period increase the individual time limit for all speakers.
3. The Chair will recognize speakers on a first come basis.
4. In order to comply with the minute requirements of RSA 91-A:2, II, speakers shall identify themselves clearly for the record.

OPTIONAL PROVISIONS – SELECT ONE OF THE ITALICIZED PARAGRAPHS

5. *Members of the public shall limit comments only to those items appearing on the current agenda. The Board will not entertain comments on items that do not appear on the agenda. The only exception shall be comments which address matters discussed by the Board at its last public meeting which were not on that meeting's agenda but were discussed by the Board under "New Business". Requests to address the Board on specific matters (i.e., a request to have a matter placed on an agenda) should be presented to the Superintendent no less than fourteen days prior to the next Board meeting, and must set forth the specifics of the subject to be address. The determination whether to place the matter on the agenda will be made consistent with Board Policy [BEDB].*

--OR--

Except as otherwise provided in this policy, members of the public may offer comments on agenda items or upon any other matter of public concern directly relating to the District's school policies, programs and operations. In the interest of preserving individual privacy and due process rights, the Board requests that comments (including complaints) regarding individual employees (other than the Superintendent) or individual students be directed to the Superintendent in accord with the complaint/grievance resolution processes set forth in School Board Policies **KE and/or KEB**. Complaints regarding the Superintendent, may be made either during public comment, or directed to the School Board Chair as described in Board Policy **KEB**.

1. Any comments which do not adhere to the above, or which disrupt the official business of the Board may be ruled out of order by the Chair. Repeated disruption may result in the individual being asked to leave the meeting. Obscene speech, comments threatening bodily harm, or other unprotected speech will not be tolerated.

2. The Board Chair may terminate the speaker’s privilege of address if the speaker does not follow the above rules of order. Repeated violations or disruptions may result in the intervention of law enforcement, with the potential for criminal charges.

Persons appearing before the Board are reminded that members of the Board are without authority to act independently as individuals in official matters. Thus, in most instances, any board response will be deferred pending consideration by the full Board.

With the aim of maintaining focus on the issues in discussion, it is desired that all speakers strive to adhere to ordinary norms of decorum and civility.

Legal References:

RSA 91-A:2, Meetings Open to the Public

RSA 91-A:3, Non-Public Sessions

U.S. Const., 1st Amendment

NHSBA history: Revised: September 2018; May 2007; November 1999; July 1998; and February 2004

**Sample Policy BHC
BOARD-EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS**

Category: Optional

See also GBD

The Board desires to maintain open channels of communication between itself and the employees. The basic line of communication will, however, be through the Superintendent of Schools.

Staff Communications to the Board

All communications or reports to the Board or any Board committee from principals, supervisors, teachers, or other employee members shall be submitted through the Superintendent.

Board Communications to Staff

All official communications, policies, and directives of employee interest and concern will be communicated to employee members through the Superintendent, and the Superintendent will employ all such media as are appropriate to keep employee fully informed of the Board’s actions and concerns.

Visits to Schools

Individual Board members interested in visiting schools or classrooms will inform the Superintendent of such visits and make arrangements for visitations through the principals of the various schools. Such visits shall be regarded as informal expressions of interest in school affairs and not as “inspections” or visits for supervisory or administrative purposes. Official visits by Board members will be carried on only under Board authorization and with the full knowledge of the Superintendent and principals.

Social Interaction

Staff and Board members share a keen interest in the schools and in education generally, and it is to be expected that when they meet at social affairs and other functions, they will informally discuss such matters as educational trends, issues, and innovations and general District problems. However, employees are

reminded that individual Board members have no special authority except when they are convened at a legal meeting of the Board or vested with special authority by Board action. Therefore, discussions of personalities or personnel grievances by either party will be considered unethical conduct.

Reviewed: February 2004
Revised: November 1999, July 1998

Sample Policy KE

PUBLIC COMPLAINTS

Category: Recommended

The Board believes that complaints and grievances are best handled and resolved by the parties directly concerned. Therefore, the proper channeling of complaints involving instruction, discipline or learning materials will be as follows:

1. Teacher
2. Principal
3. Superintendent
4. Board of Education

Any complaint presented to the Board about school personnel shall be referred back through proper administrative channels. The Board will not hear complaints from individuals until such complaints have first been brought forth through the appropriate and applicable administrative procedures. Exceptions to this provision are for complaints that relate solely to Board actions or Board operations.

In the event a complaint is made directly to an individual Board member, the procedure outlined below shall be followed:

1. The Board member shall refer the person making the complaint to the Superintendent or for investigation. The Superintendent may delegate the investigation to the Principal.
2. If the member of the public will not personally present the complaint to the Superintendent or Principal, the Board member shall then ask that the complaint be written and signed. The Board member will then refer the complaint to the Superintendent for investigation.
3. If the person making a complaint feels that a satisfactory reply has not been received from the Superintendent may request that the complaint be heard by the Board. The Board will hear and act upon the complaint only by majority vote. If the Board does hear and act upon the complaint, all Board decisions shall be final.

Reviewed: October 2004; Revised: July 1998, May 2007

Sample Policy KEB
PUBLIC COMPLAINT ABOUT SCHOOL PERSONNEL, EMPLOYEES, STUDENTS, OR ADMINISTRATION

Category: Recommended

See Also: BEDH & KE

Any complaint presented to the Board about school personnel, employees, students or administration, will be referred back to the Superintendent. The Board will not hear or review complaints until such complaints have first been brought forth through the appropriate and applicable administrative procedures and the Superintendent or his/her designee has had a reasonable opportunity to seek to resolve the complaint.

The Board may decline to hear any complaint, which will interfere with its ability to serve as an impartial trier of fact in any related student or personnel matter. This complaint procedure shall not supersede or modify any right held by employees of the District under federal law, state law, contract, or collective bargaining agreement.

To the extent it is deemed appropriate by the Superintendent, the individual who is the subject of the complaint may be advised of the nature of the complaint and may be given an opportunity for explanation, comment, and presentation of the facts. The Superintendent shall seek to resolve the matter and report to the Board.

Complaints about the Superintendent may be made directly to the Board through the Clerk, but only after reasonable efforts have been made by the complaining party to resolve their complaint directly with the Superintendent. The Board may, to the extent it is appropriate, advise the Superintendent of the nature of the complaint and may give the Superintendent an opportunity for explanation, comment, and presentation of facts.

In the event a complaint is made directly to an individual Board member, the procedure outlined below shall be followed:

1. The Board member shall refer the person making the complaint to the Superintendent or for investigation. The Superintendent may delegate the investigation to a Principal or other administrator.
2. If the member of the public will not personally present the complaint to the Superintendent or Principal, the Board member shall then ask that the complaint be written and signed. The Board member will then refer the complaint to the Superintendent for investigation.
3. If the person making a complaint believes that a satisfactory reply has not been received from the Superintendent, he or she may request that the Board hear the complaint. The Board will hear and act upon the complaint only by majority vote. The Board may decline to act on any complaint which, in its sole judgment, would interfere with the Superintendent's ability to properly administer the district. If the Board does hear and act upon the complaint, all Board decisions shall be final.
4. If the Board decides, in accord with Paragraph Three, to hear and act upon a complaint that pertains to personnel, employee, student or administrative matters, it shall determine whether the complaint shall be heard in public or non-public session in accord with RSA 91-A:3 and the laws pertaining to student and family privacy rights. The Board shall also determine whether it is appropriate to inform the individual who is the subject of the complaint of the meeting and to

provide said individual with further opportunity for explanation, comment, and presentation of the facts to the Board.

5. If the Superintendent is the subject of the complaint, the Board shall determine whether the complaint should be heard in public or non-public session in accord with RSA 91-A:3. The Board may, to the extent it is appropriate, advise the Superintendent of the nature of the complaint and may give the Superintendent an opportunity for explanation, comment, and presentation of the facts.

Revised: May 2007
Reviewed: October 2004
Revised: July 1998



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Board Success Through Good Policy

The development of clear, sound and legal policies is critical to the successful operation of any school district. In this time of increased accountability and the mandates of the “No Child Left Behind” legislation and newly passed states statutes, effective policies can help support the board’s primary purpose: advancing student achievement. Adopting policy is among the most fundamental responsibilities of any board of education.

Many problems faced by boards could have been prevented or resolved by the deletion of a poor policy or by the addition of a good policy. Policy is the tool that provides the board power to allow or require action. It is through policy that lay citizens can govern effectively. The board is a policy-making body and the policies that it enacts are the local law of the school district. Policies are broad guidelines, philosophical statements set by the school board to chart the district’s course of action.

Guidelines

As we start a new school year, some guidelines should be kept in mind that will help boards govern effectively through policy. Board members are in a leadership position. Therefore, policies should reflect what the board wants to see happen. Boards should also have a comprehensive policy that establishes the policy development process for the board. The policies that the board adopts should be designed to achieve the vision and mission of the school system. Avoid detailed policies that move the board into administrative issues and result in the board hearing complaints and attempting to solve problems that should be handled by the administration.

However, there are some federal and state statutes that require school boards to place in policy detailed language and/or procedures on certain issues, which normally would not be in policy. In these situations, boards have no alternative but to comply with such requirements.

Policy should cause improvements in district schools. That is responsible governance. Policy should move the school system in the desired direction. Development and adoption of policy is only the beginning of bringing about the desired action. It is essential that policy be monitored to ensure that it is being followed and the results the board desires are being achieved.

Don't abandon your policies to the boardroom shelf, website or CD. The board must maintain a program of vigorous policy oversight. Policy oversight means ensuring that your policies are accomplishing what they were designed to achieve. Policy either mandates that something happens or mandates something to happen that would otherwise not be permissible.

Evaluate

Closely related to the need to monitor policy is the need to evaluate policy to see if it is producing the desired results. When evaluating the effectiveness of policy, look to see if unintended consequences have occurred.

Access

It is also essential that community members, in addition to district staff, have easy access to the board's policies. This can be achieved through their placement on the district's website, in town and school libraries, school offices and at town hall. NHSBA'S online policy service can greatly assist local boards in placing the district's policy manual online, keeping it up-to-date, and providing easy searchable access for the entire educational community and the public.

Update

It is important that school board policy manuals are kept up-to-date. Policy development is an unending responsibility and process. Policies must change in our ever-changing world. NHSBA policy updates should be used for adopting and/or changing policies in a timely fashion. Districts must also be sure that all manuals in the district are updated when the board adopts or changes a policy.

Avoid Litigation

It is important to adopt policies on controversial or sensitive issues at a time before such issues actually arise in the district. Sound legal advice resulting in appropriate policy can help the board avoid litigation. Adopting policies on controversial or sensitive issues may often be an uncomfortable and contentious process, but it is necessary. Sound policy is no guarantee but it will help a district stay out of court.

What about Regulations?

Up to now we've been talking about policies; little has been said about regulations. But policies and their implementation through regulations go hand in hand.

A school Board policy might be called "a guide to action". It will state purpose or goal; it will express what the Board desires to achieve or wants to see happen; it will provide a

rationale and framework for specific requirements/ it may establish basic controls; it may assign general responsibility.

In contrast, a regulation will set forth specific requirements; it may list do's and don'ts; it may include step-by-step procedures; it may assign specific responsibility. Regulations provide the details for carrying out policy and enforcing it.

In most instances, Boards prefer to ask the superintendent and the administrative staff to draft the regulation that will support a policy. That makes sense. Your superintendent and other district administrators know best what procedures will and won't work; what specific requirements are necessary for the policy to succeed; and what requirements might be practical or unenforceable.

The Board can determine that new student evaluation techniques are needed, but the Board as a body cannot develop the alternate assessment strategies that will turn goals into reality. Similarly, the Board might determine that fees charged to groups using school facilities should be increased. But the Board should not proceed to figure how much to charge each group or new free formulas. The "how to" should be developed by the administration, subject to Board review.

At times a regulation will be entirely mechanics and administrative detail; if so, the Board need not specify its content. Nor is there any reason for the Board to put this type of regulation through a formal approval or adoption process. Many regulations, however, will provide the crux of Board control- requirements basic to the policy. When this is so, the Board may want to outline points to be included in the regulation; and it will review and approve the draft through a formal approval process.

Many regulatory statements- requirements, procedures, prohibitions- require Board action to be legal and enforceable. Others need the Board's official stamp of approval to assure the school community (staff, students, public) that "this is what the Board wants". And when enforcing a regulation, often the superintendent, principal, or other administrator wants the specific authority of the Board solidly behind it.

It is not feasible to list all regulations on which Board action is necessary. Such a listing would be long and much depends on the content of the particular statement. Suffice it to say that the following would be included:

1. Regulations pertaining to student admissions; denial of admission; special placement; suspension and expulsion, and conduct that might lead to these actions; transportation privileges.
2. Regulations relating to staff salaries; increments; benefits; leaves and absences; termination of employment.
3. Regulations pertaining to dealings with other Boards and agencies; with the public and community groups.
4. Procedures for hearings of any type and for resolving complaints and grievances brought by the public, parents, students, staff.

State laws vary as to the type of regulations a school Board must adopt, the rule-making authority granted only to the school Board, the rule-making authority a Board may delegate, the legal status of the superintendent, and the superintendent's powers and responsibilities. We advise you to check on these matters.

Conclusion

In conclusion, policy is the school board's most powerful tool for bringing its vision, mission and goals into reality. They are the basis for evaluating staff work, for governing student behavior and much more. They keep the district moving toward the vision the board and the community holds for the schools. Policy can and should be a force for leadership and school reform.

Local boards should govern aggressively to create the educational vision of their community, ensure there is an infrastructure in place to achieve the community's vision, establish academic standards designed to achieve the community's vision and an assessment system to measure how the vision is being achieved.

This is the board's policy role!

THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

By Susan Rountree Salter, Director of Leadership Development

Chances are, when you decided you wanted to join your local school board, you had a pretty good idea what that would entail: going to meetings once or twice a month, spending some time learning the jargon educators use and the laws that govern schools, and doing things to help kids. If only it were that simple.

With the intense public and media scrutiny on the school boards today, not to mention the complexity of the job they're asked to do, school board service has become time-intensive and one of the most demanding forms of community service.

Overnight, the newly initiated are expected to transform into skilled interpreters of school law, expert personnel managers and vigilant overseers of taxpayer's money. What's more, they are expected to function with the other board members as part of a united team, despite differences in backgrounds, political philosophies, interests, knowledge levels and expertise.

But even the most experienced board members never stop learning the technical details of the job, and those that are successful learn early that being effective requires more than knowing the tenure law or how to interpret state budgets. It requires certain behaviors that allow the board to function like a well-coached team.

How many of the following need to be added to your list of New Year's resolutions?



1. Focus on “we,” not “me.”

For your board to function effectively, each member must see the board as a team and respect the varying skills and perspectives his or her teammates bring to the arena. Effective board members operate from the belief that their peers have the best interests of students, parents, system and community at heart – even when they have radically differing opinions about how to address a problem. “Every board member has his or her own strengths they bring to the board, whether it’s finance or public relations or relations with teachers, whatever,” said former Vestavia Hills board member George Elliot. “You’ve got to take all that, put it in the pot, mix it and use it. Board members need to recognize the talents of other board members collectively.”

For members who come on board determined to “fix” specific problems they’ve already identified, it can be tempting to see themselves as catalysts for change and to believe that without their work to improve schools, the board would languish. However, such attitudes usually destroy whatever spirit of cooperation exists at the outset.

One former Alabama school board member, for example, frequently complained to the news media about the board’s “old guard,” portraying veteran members as only wanting to preserve the status quo. Her tactics angered colleagues, triggered hostile confrontations during board meetings and ultimately destroyed the board’s ability to work together as a cohesive group. Although she had sound ideas and strong backing from her constituents, she quit in mid-term, complaining that she couldn’t work with her fellow board members. Rather than engaging in dialogues with them about her proposals, debating the merits and seeking mutually agreeable solutions, the board member had spent her term continually on the attack and left office having accomplished little.

2. Treat staff and faculty with respect.

Like good bosses in the corporate world, effective school board members support the superintendent’s efforts to ensure staff members are accountable for doing their jobs well. That means setting high performance standards, making certain administrators are well trained in using the state’s personnel evaluation system, and giving thoughtful consideration on those occasions the superintendent recommends dismissing an employee, even if the employee is a friend.

However, effective board members understand that holding staff members accountable does not mean treating them with suspicion or as incompetents. Instead, they respect staffers’ expertise in their field and treat them accordingly. When they have complaints about an employee’s performance, they alert the superintendent, whose job it is to investigate. The board member who uses board meetings to call employees on the carpet publically for infractions destroys morale and turns meetings into battlegrounds.

3. Do your homework.

One of the most difficult concepts for the public to grasp about the board’s operation is that (work sessions notwithstanding) the regular board meeting is not a time for fact finding. Instead, it is the time designated for conducting the school board’s business in public. Effective board members ask most of their questions about proposals, budgets or plans before the meeting. They meet with the superintendent or relevant staff member to ensure they understand what is being proposed and why the administration considers it the best option. While they may still ask questions in the regular meeting, they come with a solid grasp of the issue.

Those who open their information packet for the first time when they sit down at the board table are not fully prepared to have a thoughtful discussion about the issues at hand and to listen to others’ concerns. Their lack of preparation requires colleagues to put board business on hold in order to bring them up to speed.

4. Listen.

Another challenging aspect of school board service is learning to listen with an open mind to those with differing views. Effective school board members know that by listening to different points of view, they can gain new insights into issues.

“Board members should remember they have two ears and one mouth and listen twice as much as they talk,” advises AASB Director of Leadership Development Susan Salter. “When you are talking, you are only hearing your own ideas.”

Likewise, effective board members know there is rarely only one side to a story. Ineffective board members, on the other hand, rush judgment. One such Alabama board member severely damaged his credibility with his colleagues and the public shortly after he joined the school board when it became apparent he would believe the first version he heard of almost any episode. No matter what information subsequently came to light, he would continue to be an ardent – and often immovable – supporter of the position espoused by the person who initially brought the issue to his attention. With experience, he learned to wait until he had more facts before making judgments, but the damage to his reputation took much longer to repair.

5. Be Courageous.

As parents become more sophisticated consumers of government services, their demands on school boards are mounting. Effective board members stick by their principles and make the decisions they believe best for the students and the school system – even when faced with pressure from special interest groups to do otherwise.

Montgomery County school board members learned that firsthand years ago when a small but vocal group of parents opposed to the federal Goals 2000 program waged a bitter battle to stop the board from pursuing a federal mag

school grant. The parent group made outrageous allegations about the board's plans, even charging the grant would result in teaching kindergartners about homosexuality. The majority of the board, once satisfied the allegations were untrue, backed the grant proposal, however, and won a multi-million dollar grant to create the new programs and give students more educational options.

Effective board members also have the courage to follow existing board policies and apply the rules equally despite strong political or parental pressure. Whether disciplining the straight-A student who claims the rifle in his car was left there accidentally after a hunting trip or the honor students caught drinking on an out-of-town field trip, effective school board members understand that bowing to pressure from influential parents puts the board on shaky legal ground when similar legal cases arise in the future. Worse, it's unfair to students without such effective advocates.

6. Support the school system and board decisions.

No board member should blindly believe his or her school system can do no wrong or that the board always makes the right decision. Humans aren't infallible. However, effective school board members are optimistic about the system's future and are committed to resolving problems without losing sight of the successes.

Ineffective board members, on the other hand, focus almost exclusively on the shortcomings. Weak administrators. Inept teachers. Ill-equipped classrooms. Deteriorating buildings. Whatever the proposal, the ineffective board member will argue it isn't the right solution or doesn't do far enough. A few such board members have even gone so far as to oppose efforts to pass tax referenda for their system. Referenda rarely pass when that happens.

While individual independence and freedom to dissent are important, effective board members are committed to the concept of majority rule. They argue their positions without attacking those with opposing views, and they support board decisions even when they are on the losing side.

But, the board member who continues to argue his point of view – whether its opposition to buying out the superintendent's contract or support for dismissing a losing coach – long after the issue has been settled by majority vote, undermines the entire board in the community. Continuing to fan the flames of unrest in the news media and among parents rarely leads to decisions being overturned but often creates doubts about the school board's effectiveness that linger long after the immediate issue has been resolved.

7. Know your role.

Accepting the difference between the roles of the board and the superintendent can be tough. Admittedly, the public expects the school board members to be able to solve their problems. But board members intent on micromanaging can be highly disruptive to a school system. When school board members make surprise visits to schools to evaluate teachers themselves, breeze past secretaries to barge into administrators' offices unannounced or sit in on job applicants' interviews, they throw the system into chaos.

Instead of trying to run the day-to-day operation of the schools, the effective board member knows the board's role is to make policy and the administration's is to enforce it. As one board member put it, the board's job is to decide *what* should be done, while the superintendent is responsible for determining *how* it gets done.

Helpful Hints To Remember:

Though they didn't make the list of the top seven habits, school board members also can improve their effectiveness by remembering the following:

- **Keep your eyes on the big picture.**

When school board members are elected or appointed to represent a specific portion of the community, they can be tempted to focus on the needs of their own constituents, rather than the system as a whole. But effective board members balance their districts' needs with those of their systems to ensure that the board's broader goals are met.

- **Be honest.**

Effective board members are honest with others and themselves. They base decisions on principles and are straightforward about their beliefs. Likewise, they don't mislead colleagues or the public by omitting pertinent details about the impact of a plan or their support for it. Those that do tank the community's faith in them as individuals and the board as a whole, said the Rev. Clifford Jones, a former member of the Auburn school board. "If they know you're not going to vacillate on your principles, they'll accept what you say," he said.

- **Keep children first in your thoughts.**

Often boards become so involved in hiring personnel, approving bus routes and cafeteria service, monitoring finances, handling community and staff complaints, and coping with personality conflicts that they forget the real reason they were elected or appointed: to serve schoolchildren. The basis of every board decision should be whether or not your position is in students' best interest.

Helpful Hints To Remember Continued:

- **Remember you have no authority individually.**

This can be difficult for board members and the community. Board members often promise to fire an incompetent teacher or vow that the board won't take an unpopular action. However, individually, you have no authority to make such promises into realities. Only when the board makes decisions as a body can actions be taken. Individually, you cannot act alone unless the board as a whole specifically delegates a task to you.

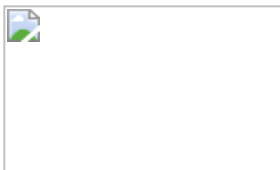
- **Stay out of personnel problems.**

Effective board members remember the superintendent and staff are responsible for resolving personnel issues. The board only should become involved when the superintendent recommends action. This is particularly important in cases that could lead to the dismissal of an employee. One Alabama board learned the hard way when a board member's public criticism of an employee and vows to see her dismissed torpedoed efforts by the superintendent to fire the woman. Because the board sits in a quasi-judicial capacity on dismissals, the member's comments were viewed by the board's own attorney as prejudicial, and the board was warned the board could lose if the woman challenged her dismissal in a lawsuit.

- **Quickly learn how to disagree agreeably.**

Effective board members share their ideas and opinions and listen to the opinions of others. Just because someone else's opinion is different than yours doesn't make it wrong.

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Choosing Good School Governance

By Linda J. Dawson and Randy Quinn

Does your board find itself so caught up with day-to-day issues that you can't see beyond the current crisis? That's precisely when you should stop the machinery and figure out just what keeps you from dealing with true board work and from providing effective leadership.

Here are a few questions for school boards to ponder -- and some possible solutions for you to consider.

Question 1: Why do boards do what they do?

Some school boards do things without considering why. We have observed boards spending time approving the payment of bills, mostly for goods or services that already have been purchased or delivered, and sometimes even after the bills themselves have been paid. Why?

We also have seen board meetings taken over by dominant outside groups and individuals to pursue their own agendas. They prevent the board from doing its work and add hours to the crowded personal schedules of individual members. Why?

We've observed board members showing up for meetings with no real understanding or knowledge of why certain items are on the agenda, or what the board is expected to do with them. Why?

And finally, we have seen board members trying valiantly to make sense of staff reports on topics that have little or no relevance to the board's main job: governing the district. Why?

Our answer: The board has not taken responsibility for its own agenda.

Boards have become accustomed to dealing with whatever their agendas ask them to consider, whether it makes sense to them or not. Typically, the responsibility for developing agendas falls on the superintendent's shoulders, along with some input from the board president. If this is your board's routine, you are not deciding what your job is and how you should do it; you are doing the job the superintendent has decided you should do.

We do not mean to criticize the superintendent, who probably is doing his or her best to design an agenda that reflects what the board wants. But the result of this method is that the board has deferred the determination and execution of its job to its chief employee, making itself captive to an administrative agenda.

Our solution: Create an annual calendar of board work. Outline in advance the issues you believe the board should spend meeting time on during the next 12 months. Expect the calendar to drive the development of monthly or semi-monthly agendas. You won't become entangled in the continuing challenge to put together monthly meeting agendas, if you have created an annual work plan.

Be diligent in deciding what other matters to place on the agenda as it is finalized. A well-defined purpose should exist for every item the board is being asked to consider. Board members should leave every meeting believing their time was well spent.

Another solution: Tie every item on the agenda to an existing governing policy. If there is no relevant policy, the issue may not be the responsibility of the board. If every item on the agenda is based on board governing policy, the conversation is framed up and placed in context for meaningful board-level discussion.

Question 2: Why do boards do what they do the way they do it?

All boards have their customs and habits, but some of them just don't make sense.

These customs include board presidents routinely recognizing each individual member for comments on every item on the agenda. If an agenda has 10 items for the board to discuss, and if every member of a seven-member board feels obliged to speak on each one of them for three minutes, the time

required would be 3.5 hours. Why?

Frequently, we see boards being held captive by one of their own members who has free rein to consume unlimited time by demanding extraordinary attention for their own personal gratification. Members are at the mercy of one who marches to a very different drummer. The majority go home angry and frustrated, while the dominant member goes home satisfied and sleeps very well. Why?

Our answer: Decide what you want your governing culture to be and institute the rules necessary to achieve it.

Nothing prevents boards from imposing whatever type of discipline they choose to help get their work done effectively and efficiently. Other public bodies do this, including Congress, provincial governments, state legislatures, and city and county governing bodies. Yet school boards, for whatever reason, sometimes allow themselves to be dominated by behaviors that other public bodies would never tolerate.

If a board permits these customs, practices, and unhelpful behaviors to sidetrack and prohibit it from getting meaningful work done, it has only itself to blame.

Our solution: Back away from your current concept of how your board operates and ask a few questions:

- If we were meeting here as the very first board ever seated to govern this district, how would we choose to organize ourselves to get our work done?
- How would we build an agenda for our meetings?
- What rules would we impose on ourselves?
- How would we self-discipline poor practices or behaviors?

Would your answers result in a board that looks the same as your board now looks?

Question 3: What is your job as a board and as a member?

Boards carefully define the superintendent's job when they negotiate a contract, and they expect the superintendent to communicate clear job expectations for every employee. But who decides what the board's job is? The superintendent?

We aren't necessarily talking here about the legal duties assigned to school boards by states. Rather, consider the real jobs school boards create for themselves that transcend their legal responsibilities.

During all of our combined 60 years of working with school boards, one constant has been our challenge to help boards define their jobs. Role definition generally has been a seat-of-the-pants decision, depending on the crisis of the moment.

Our answer: Boards must deliberately craft their own job description and performance expectations.

You and your colleagues must decide: What do you expect of your board and how will you do your job? What is the relationship and clear accountability you will establish with your superintendent?

As school boards recognize the wisdom of adopting more formal governance operating systems, they also adopt the understanding that their own job is not merely an extension of the superintendent's job. Their job is entirely different. The superintendent's job is to lead, manage, and execute, while the board's job is to lead, direct, and govern. They are fundamentally different, but complementary, roles.

Our solution: Sit down as a board, perhaps with professional coaching, and thoughtfully and clearly define your job.

Some job-related questions include:

- Is it the board's job to determine the vision and expected student outcomes for the district? Or does the board hire a superintendent to develop a vision?
- Should the board deliberate and approve the superintendent's "how to" strategies? Or should the board decide "what" the district is expected to achieve, and then hold the professionals accountable for making it happen?
- Who decides the non-negotiable standards for all district operations and determines successful performance?

Question 4: How do you evaluate your superintendent?

Many boards struggle with superintendent evaluation. Some years ago, we wrote an article on superintendent evaluation. It was based on our experiences with boards dealing with this issue.

We have worked with boards that rated their superintendents on superficial elements such as their choice of automobile or where they lived. Others dinged their superintendents for out-of-district professional travel. One superintendent, incredibly, was faulted for spending too much time dealing with underperforming students.

Our answer: Superintendents need to know and understand their boards' expectations. They are entitled to clear information on what they are accountable for before any evaluation is made. Otherwise, there are no standards against which the evaluation will be relevant.

Make the district's performance and the superintendent's performance the same. That's a different concept from the norm, we understand, but let's step back and think this one through.

We believe the superintendent is hired to do two things: to ensure that students learn to the standard the board defines; and to make sure that the district meets the board's standards of operation in all functional areas. If that is a comfortable concept, then two crucial steps must be taken to make it work:

1. The board must deliberately define its expected student achievement outcomes and agree on the metrics that are acceptable for monitoring reasonable performance progress; and
2. The board must define the standards for all operational areas of the district and agree on the monitoring measures and resulting data that prove whether the district is meeting those standards.

If these two steps are taken in advance -- with the participation and support of the superintendent -- both student performance and the district's operational performance are formatively monitored throughout the year.

At the end of the annual monitoring cycle, the superintendent is credited with the summative judgments of the board, based on agreed upon data points. In this way, the district's performance becomes the superintendent's performance, and the latter now becomes meaningful.

Make a choice

We believe that, if boards have the vision and the will, they can elevate their governance performance to levels they rarely even dream of. They merely need to exercise the choice that is theirs to govern better, more effectively, and more powerfully.

We consider the linkage between the boardroom and the classroom to be critical to the overall success of the districts for which boards are responsible.

All of us have seen the results of boards that are truly outstanding, that have led the charge for improvement, and that are setting the standard of governance excellence and district performance for others to follow.

We also have observed the consequences when boards have set a different kind of example. Those boards have allowed a lack of role clarity, focus, self-discipline, or preoccupation with management to break down morale, trust, and progress.

Both kinds of boards made conscious choices. In fact, not making a choice in itself is a choice.

Linda J. Dawson and Randy Quinn are founding partners of AGI: Aspen Group International (aspen@aspengroup.org), a consulting firm specializing in leadership development for governing boards of public and nonprofit organizations.

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Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards

Chuck Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien

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Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards

More than 90,000 men and women are members of local school boards in the United States, all serving as important trustees of the nation's public education systems. According to the National School Boards Association, these public officials serve on 13,809 elected or appointed boards in the U.S.

Most of the public knows that school boards do things like set the budgets, establish school boundaries and set school policies. But does school boards' work affect student achievement? The higher media visibility of teachers and principals in the push for better learning, while important, has led some to question whether school boards matter.

From a research perspective, it's a complex question. Isolating what makes an effective board—that is, one that impacts student achievement—involves evaluating virtually all functions of a board, from internal governance and policy formulation to communication with teachers, building administrators, and the public.

But the answer is: Yes, they do. In this research brief, NSBA's Center for Public Education looks at indicators of school board effectiveness. From this research, it is clear that school boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-achieving districts. In the most dramatic examples from this research, scholars compared districts with similar levels of poverty and disadvantage to determine factors that separate high-performing districts from those with low performance. In many cases, these differences included the approaches taken by local school boards.

So what do these boards do? Here are some examples:

- Boards in high-achieving districts are more likely to engage in goal setting and monitoring their progress.
- They are increasingly data savvy—identifying student needs and justifying decisions based on data.

- Board members possess detailed knowledge of their district, including initiatives to jump-start success.
- Board members have crafted a working relationship with superintendents, teachers, and administrators based on mutual respect, collegiality and a joint commitment to student success.

For the full list of eight characteristics of effective school boards, keep reading.

Background on the studies

Despite the pivotal role of school boards in the nation’s educational framework, comparatively few studies focused on the practices and effectiveness of elected or appointed boards. As Sam Stringfield and Deborah Land noted in their 2002 study, *Educating At-Risk Students*, “quantitative and qualitative studies of board effectiveness are virtually non-existent,” (Land and Stringfield, National Society for the Study of Education, 2002). Nonetheless, while there may be no magic bullet to assess boards comprised of individuals with divergent views, there is a consistent body of research examining the characteristics and practices of effective school boards. (For the purpose of this paper, effective boards are those operating in high-achieving districts, particularly those that are making significant strides despite serving large numbers of disadvantaged students.)

Much of the research cited here focuses on school board/district practices and approaches gleaned through interviews, surveys, observations and qualitative measures rather than in-depth quantitative information. Several studies also date back to the early 2000s or earlier; as a result, the data have limitations.

Nonetheless, the research base now includes notable studies comparing the practices of boards in high-achieving districts and contrasting those with practices of boards in lower-achieving districts. Several of these include detailed case studies exploring the evolution of districts from low performing to high achieving—a process that includes discussion of the school board role. In addition, scholars have used quantitative methods to assess the effect of district leadership on student achievement; often, this assessment includes data and trends related to school board operation, thus providing rich details on the evolution and, in some cases, transformation of local boards.

Taken together, these reports provide a sound basis to explore the role played by school boards in student achievement. The pertinent studies for this paper fall into three general areas:

- Meta-analyses of education research, with a focus on the practices of boards, superintendents, and other school leaders;
- Case studies of high-achieving districts, with a focus on the evolving role of school boards; and
- Studies that compare school board practices in districts with similar demographics but substantially different student outcomes as reflected by annual assessments and other factors.

Meta-Analysis: In 2006, J. Timothy Waters and Robert Marzano of Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) examined 27 studies since 1970 that, they concluded, included rigorous quantitative methods to assess the effect of school district leadership on student achievement. Their analysis, *School District Leadership That Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement: Meta-analysis of Influence of District Administrators on Student Achievement*, looked at more than two

dozen studies covering more than 2,800 districts and 3.4 million students. Of the 27 studies examined, 14 had information about the relationship between district leadership and average student academic achievement.

Case Studies: Several studies on district leadership focus at least in part on board activities. The Learning First Alliance study, *Beyond Islands of Excellence*, (Togneri and Anderson, 2003), examined the practices in five school districts with high student test scores despite moderate to high student poverty levels. Districts in the study were Aldine, Tex., Independent School District; Chula Vista, Calif., Elementary School District; Kent County Public Schools in Maryland; Minneapolis, Minn., Public Schools, and Providence, R.I., Public Schools.

Also, a study of 10 districts in five states, *Getting There from Here* (Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman, 1997), sought to identify the effect of quality governance on student achievement. Included in the analysis was an examination of the relationship between school board and superintendent and characteristics of effective board leadership. Researchers selected the districts to reflect diversity in size, geography, student achievement, graduation rates, dropout rates, board/superintendent relations and race/ethnic factors.

Studies with Comparison Districts: One of the richest data sets available is the Lighthouse I study of the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB). Looking at similar districts with either unusually high or unusually low records on student achievement, the project examined the role of boards and how they relate to student achievement. In studying Georgia districts, Lighthouse I contrasted the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of school board members from high- and low performing districts. Since conducting this original study in 1998-2000, IASB has expanded the project into an action research approach, identifying pilot districts in Iowa for further testing of this concept (Lighthouse II) and launching a multi-state project focused on board leadership (Lighthouse III). Multiple Lighthouse research papers were cited in this report, including *The Lighthouse Inquiry: School Board/Superintendent Team Behaviors in School Districts with Extreme Differences in Student Achievement* (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2001), *The Lighthouse Re-*

EIGHT CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision
2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.
4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
5. Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.
7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.

search: *Past, Present and Future: School Board Leadership for Improving Student Achievement* (Iowa School Boards Foundation, 2007) and in the Thomas Alsbury-edited *The Future of School Board Governance: Relevancy and Revelation* (2008).

In addition, *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement* (MDRC for Council of Great City Schools, 2002) examined what it termed “fast-moving” urban districts and compared them with slower-moving districts of similar size and demographics. In selecting the districts, researchers looked for cities with improvement in reading and math in more than half of their grades through spring 2001. Districts also had to achieve growth rates faster than their respective states and narrow racial achievement gaps. The project ultimately focused on Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the Houston Independent School District, the Sacramento, Calif., United School District, and a subset of New York City schools known as the Chancellor’s District. One key research question was to examine district-level strategies used to improve student achievement and reduce racial achievement disparities. Several of these strategies involved school boards.

Finally, a 1993 report on school leadership in British Columbia, Canada, *The Politics of Excellence: Trustee Leadership and School District Ethos*, concluded that districts with a productive “ethos” produced higher-than-expected student achievement and lower-than-expected costs over time (LaRocque and Coleman, 1993). The role of the board was part of this district “ethos.”

In reviewing these studies, it is reasonable to conclude that school boards in high-achieving school districts look different, and that they often feature characteristics and approaches that differ, from those in lower-achieving districts.

Eight characteristics of effective boards

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.

In comparing district leadership and student achievement, Waters and Marzano (2006) identified five specific district leadership responsibilities that positively correlated with student achievement:

- Establishing a collaborative process to set goals;
- Establishing “non-negotiable goals” (that is, goals all staff must act upon once set by the board) in at least two areas: student achievement and classroom instruction;
- Having the board align with and support district goals;
- Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction; and
- Using resources to support achievement and instruction goals.

“Publicly adopting broad five-year goals for achievement and instruction and consistently supporting these goals, both publicly and privately, are examples of board-level actions that we found to be positively correlated with student achievement,” they said. Typically, they adopted the goals with specific achievement targets and benchmarks. “The board ensures that these goals remain the top priorities in the district and that no

other initiatives detract attention or resources from accomplishing these goals.” The districts also provided professional development to board members and examined the effectiveness of such training.

In *Beyond Islands of Excellence*, Togneri and Anderson (2003) provided examples of the positive effects of goal setting. In its case studies, the majority of high-achieving districts adopted specific goals and boards adopted policies to consistently support them. At three case study sites—Kent County, Md., Minneapolis, and Providence—boards adopted broad strategic plans that contained both goals and the action steps needed to attain them. To assess progress on a regular basis, Kent County and Minneapolis also added indicators of success to the plan so board members could review gains or address challenges.

Each district also adopted what Togneri and Anderson termed a simply stated vision of student success. For goals on student achievement, board members identified brief, one-line vision statements such as “All our students will achieve on grade level” and used them in public and staff presentations. Significantly, the report said, school boards and superintendents also carefully examined how to stretch limited dollars to focus sufficient funding on the goals.

The Lighthouse I studies (2001, 2007) also offer important details about the importance of identifying goals. In high-achieving districts, board members adopted goals and had detailed knowledge about their relationship to curriculum, instruction, assessment and staff development. As a result, these public officials could identify not only the purposes and processes behind school improvement initiatives but also the board’s role in supporting these efforts. By comparison in low-achieving districts, board members were “only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives,” researchers noted. “They were sometimes aware of goals, but seldom able to describe actions being taken by staff members to improve learning.”

Notably, these differences extended down to the staff level. In high-achieving districts, staff members could link the school board’s goals to building-level goals for student learning and explain how the goals impacted classrooms. “Staff members identified clear goals for improvement, described how staff development supported the goals, and how they were monitoring progress based on data about student learning.” By comparison in the low-achieving districts, “There was little evidence of a pervasive focus on school renewal at any level when it was not present at the board level.”

2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.

In the Lighthouse I studies (2001, 2007), board members consistently expressed their belief in the learning ability of all children and gave specific examples of ways that learning had improved as a result of district initiatives. Poverty, lack of parental involvement and other factors were described as challenges to be overcome, not as excuses. Board members expected to see improvements in student achievement quickly as a result of initiatives. Comments made by board members in Lighthouse were indicative of the differences. In a high-achieving district, one board member noted, “This is a place for all kids to excel.” Another board member noted, “Sometimes people say the poor students have limits. I say all kids have limits. I believe we have not reached the limits of any of the kids in our system.”

Yet in low-achieving districts, board members frequently referred to external pressures as the main rea-

sons for lack of student success. Board members often focused on factors that they believed kept students from learning, such as poverty, lack of parental support, societal factors, or lack of motivation. Board members expected it would take years to see any improvements in student achievement. For these board members, the reasons for pursuing change often were simple ones—to meet state mandates (and avoid sanctions) and a desire to not “have the lowest test scores” in the state.

In addition, board members in low-achieving districts offered many negative comments about students and teachers when they were interviewed by Lighthouse researchers. Said one, “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make them drink. This applies to both students and staff.”

In one low-performing district, teachers made 67 negative comments about students and their parents during Lighthouse interviews. In a similar number of interviews in a high-performing district, there were only four such comments.

3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.

According to Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman (1997), another characteristic of quality governance is the ability to focus on student achievement while spending comparatively little time on day-to-day operational issues. In interviews with hundreds of board members and staff across the districts, they found that high-performing boards focus on establishing a vision supported by policies that target student achievement. Yet poor governance is characterized by factors such as micro-management by the board; confusion of the appropriate roles for the board member and superintendent; interpersonal conflict between board chair and superintendent; and board member disregard for the agenda process and the chain of command.

Case studies of individual districts in other studies support many of these findings. In Chula Vista, Calif., the board took its policy role seriously and developed policies that supported instructional reform. As profiled in Togneri and Anderson (2003), the focus began when top administrators recognized a need for a new cadre of exceptional principals and asked the school board for help. In response, the board approved a policy with higher salaries for principals, giving the district more leverage to attract quality candidates to the district. Later, the board granted the central office greater flexibility to provide principal raises and bonuses. Members also supported the superintendent in dismissing principals who did not meet performance standards; this smaller but still significant action reflected the policy and partnership approach adopted earlier by the board.

Other case studies in this report were replete with examples of board commitment to policy and accountability, something often reflected through visions and strategic plans. In Aldine, Tex., board members made sure to adopt strategic plans that placed children’s learning needs front and center. As one Aldine board member explained, “Everything we do is based on what’s best for the children, period. Whether you are dealing with an administrative issue or a student issue, we ask, ‘What’s best for the children?’”

With everyone on board to promote achievement, boards encouraged their staffs to tackle difficult issues and seek innovative solutions. As a result, the districts engaged in a collegial policy-making process that emphasized the need to find solutions. An administrator in Kent County, Md., summed up the board’s work as follows: “The board recognizes its role as a policy-maker. [Board members] are very professional.

They never humiliate each other. They have no hidden agendas. The goal is what is best for the children.”

Boards held the superintendent and his or her colleagues accountable for progress but did not engage in the daily administration of schools. Explained one board member: “I am not a professional educator... [The superintendent and her staff] are the professionals, and we say to them, “These are the results we want to see; you are in charge of how to do it.””

Likewise, Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlihy’s case studies (2002) include similar findings. The groups concluded that fast-moving districts had developed a consensus among board members and other leaders on the identification and implementation of improvement strategies. This required a new role for the school board, which focused on decisions “that support improved student achievement rather than on the day-to-day operations of the district.”

In Lighthouse II (2007), researchers identified five pilot school districts and provided technical assistance and support to the boards based on research findings documented in Lighthouse I.

Results from this study also showed that districts made gains when they were able to focus on achievement rather than administrative issues. In the majority of districts, boards spent more than double the amount of time on policy and student achievement than they did prior to Lighthouse II. It was also common for these districts to schedule additional work sessions on student achievement. (More information on Lighthouse II is in the sidebar on the next page).

A DOZEN DANGER SIGNS

While this paper did not specifically focus on characteristics of ineffective school boards, it may be helpful to review some of the descriptions of ineffective boards mentioned in the research:

1. Only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives, and seldom able to describe actions being taken to improve student learning
2. Focused on external pressures as the main reasons for lack of student success, such as poverty, lack of parental support, societal factors, or lack of motivation
3. Offer negative comments about students and teachers
4. Micro-manage day-to-day operations
5. Disregard the agenda process and the chain of command
6. Left out the information flow; little communication between board and superintendent
7. Quick to describe a lack of parent interest in education or barriers to community outreach
8. Looked at data from a “blaming” perspective, describing teachers, students, and families as major causes for low performance
9. Little understanding or coordination on staff development for teachers
10. Slow to define a vision
11. Did not hire a superintendent who agreed with their vision
12. Little professional development together as a board

4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.

The Lighthouse I studies are particularly relevant in conveying this theme. Looking across high- and low-achieving districts in Georgia, school board members in high achieving districts had strong communication between the superintendent, staff, and each other. They received information from many sources including the superintendent, curriculum director, principals, teachers, and sources outside the district. While the superintendent was a primary source of information, he or she was not the only source. In addition, findings and research were shared among all board members. By comparison, in low-achieving districts, board members expressed concern that not all information was shared or shared equally. As a result, researchers said, “Some felt left out of the information flow.”

In high-achieving districts, school board members could provide specific examples of how they connected and listened to the community, and were able to identify concrete ways they promoted this involvement. Likewise, staff members in these districts described the boards as supportive, noting that these public officials “would respect and listen to them.” In interviews, board members were quick to note how they communicated actions and goals to staff. One strategy was to schedule post-board meetings to provide teachers and administrators with in-depth briefings on policy decisions.

By comparison, school boards in

**CONVERTING RESEARCH TO ACTION:
LIGHTHOUSE II**

Building on the success of Lighthouse I—which identified the different knowledge, beliefs and actions of school boards in high-achieving districts—the Iowa Association of School Boards expanded the initiative to begin embedding these ideas in other jurisdictions.

Under Lighthouse II, from 2002 to 2007, IASB identified five pilot districts in Iowa and offered technical assistance and support to the board, superintendent, and, at some sites, district leadership teams. The goal was to move entire districts from one set of assumptions, beliefs and practices to another: the set possessed by the high-achieving districts in Lighthouse I. After five years of work, the project showed significant gains:

- In three of the five districts, the time spent on policy and student achievement during regular board meetings increased from 16 percent to 37 percent.
- By the end of the project, boards in all five districts regularly scheduled extra time for boards to focus on student achievement.
- Four of the sites showed significant increases—some as high as 90 percent—in the number of staff and board members who could consistently describe the district’s school improvement goals.
- At all sites, 83 percent to 100 percent of all staff and board members reported a clear, district-wide focus on improving literacy.
- All districts, by year 3 of the project, agreed strongly that local school boards can positively affect student achievement.
- By year 3, significant gains on a measure of reading comprehension were seen at every grade level in one district. In addition, in the fourth year of the study, four of the five sites showed statistically significant gains in student reading and/or math for at least two grade levels on the statewide norm-referenced measure of achievement.

Starting in 2008, IASB launched the Lighthouse III project, through which the association is working with several states to outline best practices for school boards and state school board associations.

low-achieving districts were likely to cite communication and outreach barriers. They were quick to describe a lack of parent interest in education; in fact, they were able to list only a few efforts to solicit community involvement. Compared with board members from high-achieving districts, they frequently noted frustration with the lack of community involvement and said there was little they could do about it. As for relationships within the district, staff members from the comparison low-achieving districts contacted for the research often said they didn't know the board members at all.

While such findings perhaps could be limited to high- and low-achieving districts in Georgia, other research highlights similar findings. Similar factors were evident in Waters and Marzano's 2006 meta-analysis of 27 studies. In this study, the authors found that high-achieving districts actively involved board members and community stakeholders in setting goals.

While individual board members did pursue their own issues, the researchers said, there was a reluctance to place these issues at center stage. "When individual board member interests and expectations distract from board-adopted achievement and instructional goals, they are not contributing to district success, but in fact, may be working in opposition to that end." School board members realized, the authors noted, that these issues can be a distraction from core district goals.

5. Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.

In the Lighthouse I study, board members in high-achieving districts identified specific student needs through data, and justified decisions based on that data. In addition, board members were not shy about discussing trends on dropout rates, test scores, and student needs, with many seeking such information on a regular or monthly basis.

By comparison, board members in low-achieving districts tended to greet data with a "blaming" perspective, describing teachers, students and families as major causes for low performance. In one district, the superintendent "controls the reaction of the board to recommendations by limiting the information he gives to them." The Lighthouse I study contrasts this with the policy of a high-performance district, where the superintendent "believes sharing information will get them to react and encourage engagement." Board members in this district view data as a diagnostic tool, without the emotional response of assessing blame.

Board members in lower-performing districts also provided little evidence of considering data in the decision making process. In these districts, board members frequently discussed their decisions through anecdotes and personal experiences rather than by citing data. In many cases, the study noted, "The board talked very generally about test scores and relied on the interpretation made by the superintendent." As a result, board members believed the superintendent "owned" information, leaving it to the top administrator to interpret the data and recommend solutions.

Togneri and Anderson (2003) also emphasized how effective school boards embraced data. Boards in high-achieving districts were not afraid to confront negative data and, in fact, used it as a basis to improve teaching and learning. In Minneapolis, a renewed emphasis on data has helped drive improvement. Yet back in the mid-1990s, the district showed a wide achievement gap between white and minority students and posted a high school graduation rate barely above 40 percent. When the city's Chamber of Commerce

failed to support the school board's request for a tax increase, the board began a fundamental rethinking based on goals and data. It hired a new superintendent with a strong foundation in instructional improvement. Together, the board and superintendent developed goals and performance indicators to rank and monitor school progress. This process ultimately helped build trust among school and community leaders, eventually leading to district progress and, later, successful new tax proposals beneficial to schools.

Minneapolis was typical of the report's study districts, which "had the courage to acknowledge poor performance and the will to seek solutions." With the board, superintendent and community supporting the new process, the district developed a vision focused on student learning and instructional improvement with system-wide curricula connected to state standards with clear expectations for teachers.

6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.

Successful boards recognize the need to support high priorities even during times of fiscal uncertainty. One leading example is in providing professional development for teachers, administrators and other staff. According to LaRocque and Coleman (1993), effective boards saw a responsibility to maintain high standards even in the midst of budget challenges. "To this end, the successful boards supported extensive professional development programs for administrators and teachers, even during times of [fiscal] restraint," they wrote in *The Politics of Excellence: Trustee Leadership and School District Ethos*.

Lighthouse I researchers (2001, 2007) also identified research-based professional development for staff as one of seven "conditions for improvement" typically evident in high-achieving districts. From the board's perspective, members did not simply provide funding for such professional development – they could cite specific examples of activities and their link to improvement plans. "In high-achieving districts, board members described staff development activities in the district and could describe the link between teacher training and board or district goals for students," the study noted. "Board members described a belief in the importance of staff development activities focused on student needs."

In low-achieving districts, however, board members said teachers made their own decisions on staff development based on perceived needs in the classroom or for certification. "Board members knew there was a budget for staff development but were unsure whether there was a plan for staff development," the study noted. In fact, board members frequently made "disparaging remarks" about staff development, calling it an ineffective strategy.

Lighthouse II, as noted in Alsbury (2008) further reinforced this point. Boards not only took an active interest in professional development but also provided the infrastructure for such programming to succeed. "For most boards, this required significant changes in the allocation of resources (people, time and money) and would not have happened without a clear understanding of the characteristics of quality professional development and a belief in the importance of improving the knowledge and skills of educators in order to improve student outcomes."

Additional evidence is available in the Snipes, Doolittle and Herlihy's 2002 analysis of high- and low-achieving districts. In high-achieving districts, the board and superintendent support uniform professional development built on curriculum. In lower-achieving districts, professional development may vary extensively

from school to school. One example was in Sacramento, Calif., where teachers received at least 18 hours of in-service training per year based on uniform curricula. New teachers also received six full days of instructional training, and teachers had common planning periods to encourage collaboration on lesson plans and strategies to address student needs. In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., schools, weeklong seminars for Advanced Placement teachers, leadership retreats for principals and financial support for attaining national board certification were among effective strategies by the district to improve curriculum.

Waters and Marzano (2006) also touts the importance of professional development. While not specifically examining the school board role in this process, this study on leadership notes that “a meaningful commitment of funding must be dedicated to professional development for teachers and principals. This professional development should be focused on building the knowledge, skills and competencies teachers and principals need to accomplish a district’s goals.”

7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.

In *Getting There from Here*, Goodman and colleagues (1997) concluded that those with a strong board/superintendent relationship had greater student achievement as measured by dropout rates, the percentage of students going to college, and aptitude test scores. Goodman’s review of characteristics of quality governance included several that were directly related to school boards and their relationships:

- A trusting and collaborative relationship between the board and superintendent;
- Creation by the board of conditions and organizational structures that allowed the superintendent to function as the chief executive officer and instructional leader of the district;
- Evaluation of the superintendent according to mutually agreed upon procedures; and
- Effective communication between the board chair and superintendent and among board members.

Likewise, Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlihy (2002) also emphasizes the importance of these factors. In successful districts, boards defined an initial vision for the district and sought a superintendent who matched this vision. Nowhere was this truer than in Sacramento, Calif., one of the case study sites. In 1996, a mayor’s commission concluded that the city schools, beset with high superintendent turnover and other problems, had “a lack of accountability and deplorable building conditions.” A group of individuals focused on progress won seats on the school board, and they quickly bought out the contract of the old superintendent and hired one sharing their views. The new superintendent and board sought input from thousands of community stakeholders and ultimately adopted an action plan with specific achievement benchmarks based on student assessments such as the SAT-9. The board and superintendent also established seven “vital signs” of success, including high rates of kindergarten readiness; a student attendance rate of at least 95 percent; increased proficiency of English Language Learners; and objectives that at least 90 percent of students attain math and reading proficiency and graduate high school. Within four years, the district saw consistent gains in math and reading plus a drop in the disparity between white and Hispanic student achievement.

In contrast to this “moving” district, comparison districts had no such impetus to work toward success. Boards were slow to define a vision and often recruited a superintendent with his or her own ideas and

platform. The differences between the districts only increased over time, as boards and superintendents in high-achieving districts jointly refined their visions over time, assessed district strengths and weaknesses and had all signs of a stable relationship. By comparison, less successful districts featured boards and superintendents that were not in alignment, as the superintendent “may develop solutions without board involvement.” Such boards also may not hold superintendents accountable for goals.

8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts.

Board member development and training is a clear theme within this research base. In high-achieving Lighthouse I study districts (2001), school board members said they regularly participated in activities in which they learned together as a group. They cited frequent work and study sessions with opportunities for inquiry and discussion prior to making a final decision. In low-achieving districts, however, board members said they did not learn together except when the superintendent or other staff members made presentations of data.

Other studies focused on this subject as well, sometimes within the context of the responsibilities of an effective superintendent. In the 2006 Waters and Marzano meta-analysis, for example, one key goal for superintendents is to produce an environment in which the board is aligned with and supportive of district goals. The study suggests that supporting board members’ professional development is one of several ways that superintendents can help realize this goal.

In their study on effective governance, Goodman and colleagues (1997) emphasized in detail the importance of formal training for board members. They recommended orientation workshops for new members soon after their election. Their “sample policy statement” on orientation included a commitment by the board and administrative staff to help all new members learn board functions, policies and procedures. Chief responsibility for orientation should reside with the superintendent and board chair, they noted, but this work should include meetings with top administrative personnel to examine services, policies, and programs. As a guide, the report cited policies in Kentucky requiring a specific number of hours of training for board members based on their experience. This ranged from a high of 12 hours of annual training for board members with zero to three years experience to four hours a year for those with at least eight years of board service. Emphasizing the importance of the board/superintendent relationship, the study also recommended that superintendents participate in orientation and development workshops alongside their board members.

Elsewhere, two of the effective districts in the Togneri and Anderson (2003) study utilized formal training and professional development for school board members. In Kent County, Md., the board adopted the Baldrige in Education process, which created a strong working relationship among the central office, board, principal and teachers. In Minneapolis, the school board engaged in the Carver method, which emphasizes the board’s role in establishing goals, setting indicators, aligning resources to goals, monitoring progress, and communicating with the public.

Finally, LaRocque and Coleman (1993) illustrated the value of both formal and informal learning activities for board members. According to these researchers, effective school districts in Canada offered a mixture of learning activities for their board members, or “trustees,” including retreats, special meetings, work

sessions, school visits and even social events. As a result, the trustees had a “willingness to meet regularly with the professionals in the district to discuss what was happening and what should be happening.” This commitment conveyed to staff the importance of district goals and the importance of the staff members’ work in supporting them. In addition, they noted, “The successful boards did not just rely on district staff reports... They obtained information about programs in different ways and from different sources, and sought opportunities to interact directly with administrators and teachers.”

Related finding: Stability of leadership

In the 2002 Snipes et. al study, researchers noted that fast-moving districts had political and organizational stability, as evidenced by low rates of school board and superintendent turnover. Goodman’s research echoed all of these points, concluding two characteristics of high achieving districts were long tenures by superintendents and school board members and regular retreats by senior staff and board members for evaluation and goal setting purposes.

Similarly, Togneri and Anderson (2003) note the long tenure of board members and superintendents in high-achieving districts. “They set their courses and stayed with them for years,” the study said. Among the five successful districts profiled, superintendents in three districts had been at their jobs for at least eight years. In most of those profiled, the majority of board members had been serving in that capacity for 10 or more years. “That continuity allowed superintendents and boards to grow together in their approaches to change and to better understand each other’s work.”

Conclusion

During the past 15 years, a number of research studies have begun to document the value that school boards and their members add to the development of an effective public education system. This fledgling base of research provides a foundation for boards and other policymakers. The research also is timely, since it coincides with a period in U.S. public policy that has focused substantially greater attention on accountability in public education. Much of this research has contrasted boards in low-performing and high-performing districts, thereby providing best practices for new and veteran board members nationwide. While there is a need for additional research—a study on boards in districts with mid-range achievement might be one useful step—it is increasingly clear that board members in high-performing districts have attitudes, knowledge and approaches that separate them from their counterparts in lower-achieving districts.

Based on the studies included in this report, it is clear that school boards in high-achieving districts hold a high, shared vision about the capabilities of both students and staff—they believe that more is possible and are motivated to improve results for students. They are policy and accountability driven, focusing their time and energy on governance-level actions related to student achievement and classroom instruction. They engage in goal-setting processes that can drive action in the district to improve. They align resources—including staff professional development—around those goals. They are data savvy—using data to both diagnose problems and to monitor and drive continuous improvement efforts. They communicate with and engage staff and community and work well together as a team and in collaborative leadership with their superintendents. And, they commit to their own learning, building the knowledge and skills it takes to govern during a period of educational reform.

CENTER FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

In this era of fiscal constraints and a national environment focused on accountability, boards in high-performing districts can provide an important blueprint for success. In the process, they can offer a road map for boards in lower-achieving school districts nationwide.

This report (2011) was written by Chuck Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien. O'Brien is an independent education researcher and consultant in Alexandria, Virginia. Much of her work has focused on access to quality education for disadvantaged and minority populations. O'Brien has a Master of Public Administration from George Washington University and a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from Loyola University, Chicago. Chuck Dervarics is an education writer and former editor of Report on Preschool Programs, a national independent newsletter on pre-k, Head Start, and child care policy. As a writer and researcher, he has contributed to case studies and research projects of the Southern Education Foundation, the American Council on Education, and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, often focusing on issues facing disadvantaged populations. Dervarics has a Bachelors degree from George Washington University.

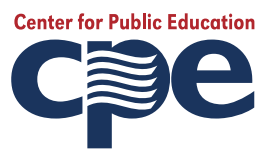
About CPE

The Center for Public Education is a national resource for credible and practical information about public education and its importance to the well-being of our nation. CPE provides up-to-date research, data, and analysis on current education issues and explores ways to improve student achievement and engage public support for public schools. CPE is an initiative of the National School Boards Association.

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Founded in 1940, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) is a not-for-profit organization representing state associations of school boards and their more than 90,000 local school board members throughout the U.S. Working with and through our state associations, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board leadership.

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The [Iowa School Board Standards](#) are designed for use by local school boards as a common framework for excellence in school board governance. Based on best practice and research, the standards encourage boards to focus on student achievement as their primary responsibility. The framework includes six standards, along with competencies and key indicators that help clarify the work of high-performing school boards.

The Standards for Effective School Boards

In pursuit of world-class education that results in high achievement for all Iowa students, effective school boards:

1. VISIONARY TEAM: Operate as a visionary governance team in partnership with the superintendent.

- **Vision and Planning** – Develops a shared vision and plans for student achievement that reflects common values and core beliefs of the school community.
- **Operating Practices** – Uses productive practices for its own operations and development.
- **Decision-Making** – Ensures board decisions are based on data and deliberation.
- **Board/Superintendent Relations** – Cultivates a strong relationship and partnership with the superintendent, based on clear expectations and accountability.

2. STUDENT LEARNING: Provide effective leadership for quality instruction and high, equitable student learning.

- **Clear Expectations** – Sets and communicates high expectations for student learning with clear goals and a focus on strengthening instruction.

- **Conditions for Success** – Supports conditions for success through board actions and decisions.
- **Accountability** – Holds the system accountable to reach student learning goals.
- **Collective Commitment** – Builds the collective commitment of community and staff to achieve the student learning goals.
- **Team Learning** – Learns together as a whole team to inform decision-making around the student learning goals.

3. DISTRICT CULTURE: Foster a culture that enables excellence and innovation.

- **High Quality Staff** – Empowers the superintendent in hiring and developing the best employees available to meet the district's goals.
- **Shared Leadership** – Supports structures that develop instructional leadership and collaboration.
- **Staff Learning** – Supports research-based staff professional development aligned with district goals.
- **Environment** – Fosters a safe and secure environment for all students, staff, and visitors.

4. POLICY & LEGAL: Lead through sound policy, ensuring transparent, ethical, legal operations.

- **Policy Leadership** – Develops sound, written policy to clarify the board's intent for district direction.
- **Legal** – Ensures that board and district actions are in compliance with state and federal laws, appropriately addressing legal issues when they arise.
- **Ethics** – Models ethical and legal behaviors which enable the board to stay focused on district goals.
- **Transparency** – Establishes policies and ensures processes that are open and accountable.

5. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY: Sustain and enhance district resources through planning and fiduciary oversight.

- **Financial Health** – Monitors and evaluates the financial health of the district, ensuring accountability and transparency in board decision making.
- **Financial Forecasting** – Ensures strong financial planning for the district.
- **Budgeting** – Ensures the district budget aligns with district goals and multi-year plans.

- **Risk Oversight** – Ensures sufficient risk management is in place to protect district resources.
- **Facilities** –Ensures school facilities enhance and enrich student and staff learning.

6. **ADVOCACY: Advocate for public education and the needs of Iowa students.**

- **Championing Local Governance & Public Education** – Clearly articulates and advocates for the value of public education and the important role of local school governance.
- **Legislative Advocacy** – Develops and strengthens on-going relationships with policymakers around improving student achievement and the needs of public education.
- **Community Engagement** – Fosters engagement and collaboration with all stakeholders to ensure high and equitable student learning.

Toolbox

Standards for Effective School Boards

Visionary Team

HR Central

Financial Tools

Policy & Legal Corner

Student Learning

New Board Member Portal

Board Presidents' Corner

Board Member Handbook

Leadership for Student Learning

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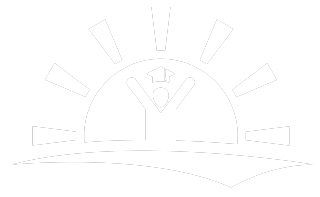
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