



THE KEY WORK OF SCHOOL BOARDS

GUIDEBOOK

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Foreword

Every high-achieving school board is focused on functioning in ways that improve student achievement. Research shows that the more effective the board, the better a school district's students perform. In every decision and every action, the school board governance role centers on improving student learning outcomes.

The school governance role has recently undergone great change. It is vastly different than it was even five years ago. At the same time, public schools are under attack by aggressive for-profit critics who persistently challenge the relevance of school boards and local control.

In today's high-stakes environment, the daily pressure on governance leaders is enormous. Fortunately, the National School Boards Association, with and through our state association members, can draw upon the national, regional, state, and local expertise to help America's school board members master and refine their knowledge, skills, and abilities. *The Key Work of School Boards* is a data-driven framework that aims to help boards achieve excellence in school governance through a roadmap designed to assist and support their work. Introduced in 2000 and updated in 2010, the Key Work is backed by research that identifies the characteristics of effective boards that can lead to improvement and sustainable change in school districts.

This update of the Key Work reflects contemporary challenges faced by today's school board members and serves as a *de facto* job description for effective and empowered boards. The revised framework addresses five areas that show how all boards can improve student achievement through excellence in governance. Through the efforts of state association partners and NSBA, the revised Key Work serves as a reliable governance guide with strategies and ideas that reflect best practice.

The five chapters in this book provide a comprehensive overview of critical board governance responsibilities. The Key Work website supplements the framework by providing an array of resources and supplemental materials, videos, how-to guides, and other tools that demonstrate guidance in action. Within the Key Work framework, five action areas are examined in detail: **Vision, Accountability, Policy, Community Leadership, and Relationships**.

Vision is the promise on the horizon. With a clear vision, boards can align budget priorities and personnel resources toward an agreed-upon goal. No discussion of schools in the 21st century would be complete without acknowledging the seismic impact that accountability – especially for student assessments – has had on educators generally and school board members in particular. Policy is a school board member's prime lever for directing the actions of district staff. Community leadership and relationships recognize the vital role board members play in being community bridge builders, legislative advocates, and team members with the superintendent.

Our hope is that you will return to this publication repeatedly, finding it a vital tool for your board service individually and collectively. This effort owes a debt of gratitude to the original *Key Work of School Boards*, which defines school board work. While that remains an excellent guidepost, the information in these chapters reflects the multitude of challenges board leaders newly encounter within today's rapidly changing education landscape.

Every child in our public schools deserves the best. The information contained in these chapters gives you the tools, resources, and knowledge as board members to stand up for each and every one of them.

Leaning Forward,
Thomas J. Gentzel

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INTRODUCTION

We know what a good school board looks like. The impressive results are evident when a board of education makes student achievement the primary focus.

In this new version of the *Key Work of School Boards*, NSBA and key collaborators from our state associations have produced a reliable guide with clear and proven strategies and ideas. We preserved the best content from previous editions while expanding the scope of pertinent Key Work areas. In this current update, we also identify new, critical Key Work areas (Policy and Board Operations, Community Leadership) of importance in the larger Key Work of School Boards framework.

We also offer brochures, videos, how-to guides, and other background material that coincides with the messages of this book in the Key Work section of www.nsba.org.

Five subject areas are described here in detail: **Vision, Accountability, Policy, Community Leadership, and Relationships.**

Vision

Effective school boards establish a clear vision with high expectations for quality teaching and learning that supports strong student outcomes. They establish clear and specific goals to move districts forward.

Accountability

High academic standards, transparency, and accountability undergird a world-class education. True accountability depends on open decision making, community engagement and support, and receptivity to new ideas and constructive criticism.

Policy and Board Operations

Policy is how a board sustainably exercises power to serve students. Through policy, school boards establish a set of cohesive guidelines able to transform vision into reality.

Community Leadership

Through public advocacy and community engagement, school boards share their concerns and actions with the public. Community leadership that builds public support is vital to implement the board's vision.

Board/Superintendent Relationships

Both the school board and the superintendent have essential leadership roles that are interconnected but different. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each in their respective roles with strong collaboration and mutual trust.

A school board's vision establishes the agreed-upon philosophy and goals for the district. Accountability – the hot education topic of the 21st century -- is how vision gets measured and judged. Policy is the main lever board members use to establish action steps to implement the vision. Community leadership is when school board members act as ambassadors and advocates for district interests. Last, but certainly not least, is cultivating an open, honest relationship

between the board and superintendent that empowers them to be united, effective change agents for smart improvements.

In 2013, NSBA conducted an environmental scan across state school boards associations to identify the board governance and leadership competencies most frequently addressed by state association board development and training activity. The findings of that scan, along with findings from the Iowa Lighthouse Study and the Center for Public Education's "8 Characteristics of Effective Boards" affirmed what we believe to be those specific board governance functions traceable to high performing boards and high performing school districts.

These bedrock principles must continue to serve as the foundation of school board leadership. Effective boards embody key characteristics, and use them in a visionary manner.

Among them:

- **Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction** and define clear goals toward that vision.
- **Effective boards make sure these goals remain their district's top priorities** and that nothing detracts from them.
- **Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values** that meld the limitless possibilities for student learning with an unshakeable confidence in the district's ability to teach all children at high levels.
- **Effective boards are accountability driven**, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies that improve student achievement. High-performing boards establish a clear and precise vision supported by policies that target student achievement.
- **Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community** and establish strong communications structures. Those efforts inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
- **Effective boards are data savvy**. They embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
- **Effective school boards align and sustain resources**, including staff professional development, to meet district goals.
- **Effective boards and their superintendents lead as a united team**, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
- **Effective school boards take part in team development and training**, joining with the superintendent to build shared knowledge, values, and commitment for improvement efforts.

The five Key Work areas in this book provide a comprehensive overview of your key governance responsibilities.

Chapter 1: Vision

Ensuring that public education will meet emerging challenges requires a clear vision for the work and operations of school boards in the future. With that vision before us, we can shape proactive strategies that make boards more relevant, credible, and effective leaders of public education.

Objective: To understand how school boards can develop and implement an effective vision that focuses on student achievement, positively guides district strategies, and involves the community.

The board's work is about vision, the mental picture of what the schools and district would be if everything were perfect. It's a mental image of success. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision. They have strong shared beliefs and values about what's possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels. Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use the insights to drive continuous improvement. Effective boards also align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.

To ensure that the board's vision becomes reality, the board should develop a strategic plan and establish policies for implementation. The board's community leadership function involves building the public support necessary to implement the vision. Boards exercise leadership by holding themselves and staff accountable for monitoring student achievement, evaluating board and district programs in light of student achievement goals, providing appropriate training opportunities, and keeping the public informed about the status of education programs and student progress. Boards need to lead as a united team with their superintendent to ensure the vision is implemented.

Why do boards need a vision? A clear and compelling vision is necessary for districts to achieve excellence. Districts that can see beyond the present and create a vision for the future reach heights that surpass the expected or even imagined. Management guru Peter Drucker wrote:

Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. We cross ... a divide. Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself — its world-view; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born.

We are living through one of these periods of transformation. As boards create vision statements, they need to ask, "Are we educating our students with educational constructs that were created for their parents and grandparents? Do students feel disconnected from the current approaches to learning?"

What Is Vision?

Vision is not about what we are, but what we want to be. It captures a critical dimension of dynamic systems. For school boards, it is about where you are going and what kind of district you are trying to create. A positive vision is future-focused and seeks to shape events rather than simply let them happen.

Vision is the ability to see and create the future education system you desire. While current realities you face are important, vision means having a clear image of what "better" looks like – and taking the necessary governance steps to get there.

Positive and inspiring visions require the widespread involvement of those whose lives will be influenced and shaped by vision. Powerful visions are the product of endless hours of discussion and dialogue among key stakeholders. Without involvement, there is unlikely to be much commitment on the part of those upon whom we must rely to achieve it.

Your vision is not the same as your mission statement. The mission statement is a simple explanation of purpose — the reason a school district exists. A mission statement clearly explains the needs the district fulfills, whom these needs are fulfilled for, and how these needs will be met.

What does having a vision do for the board? It helps you think beyond your boundaries; provides continuity for your planning; identifies direction and purpose; alerts stakeholders to needed changes; promotes interest, commitment, and laser-like focus; encourages and builds confidence; builds loyalty through involvement; and results in efficiency and productivity.

What can kill a board's vision? Commonly it is tightly held tradition, fear of ridicule, complacency among some stakeholders, short-term thinking, and naysayers.

The Value of a Shared Vision and Core Values

Developing a shared vision that reflects your school community's core values and beliefs is the starting point for a school board and its focus on student achievement. This shared vision is the kernel of the mission and goals that direct board and staff actions and gains the entire community's commitment to improving achievement for all students. Engaging the entire community in creating the vision generates support for getting the resources — both financial and human capital — necessary to make it a reality.

Building a shared vision requires you to agree on your core values and beliefs. Core values drive the vision. They underlie the work to be done, define how individuals interact with each other, and help determine the strategies necessary to fulfill the mission. Core values are the belief systems that motivate a person or group to choose one alternative over another. They are guiding principles that remain constant even when the mission and vision may change.

Knowing what you really value, individually and collectively, guides your aspirations and your mission as a district. It also guides your behavior. This small set of principles should not be confused with specific cultural or operating practices, nor are they short-term goals. In visionary school districts, core values don't need a rational or external justification because they don't sway with trends or fads and they don't shift with different priorities in education. These five to six guiding tenants are the foundation for the way the district acts, how it treats people, and what it will do to achieve the vision and mission.

Your vision should inspire, look ahead, and lead. Defining your vision is taking charge of your destiny. For districts, that destiny must be improving achievement for all students. A vision with anything less than student achievement as the top priority cannot fulfill the public education's core mission.

Sample Mission Statements

To prepare all students with the skills they need to be confident in academics, sophisticated in learning, and global in orientation.

To provide instruction by a diverse group of effective teachers that capitalizes on students' native attraction to interactivity and learning by doing.

To provide for all students exemplary programming that instills wonder, values discovery, and encourages problem solving.

To prepare all students with not only the basic areas like math, reading, and writing but also how to think and communicate in ways that will help them thrive.

To empower all students to communicate, collaborate, and learn globally.

To help students prepare for work, active citizenship and college using a combination of classroom work and community internships.

Creating A Vision

Vision becomes reality through the daily actions of everyone in the organization. In a school district, “everyone” includes employees, parents, community advocates, businesses, government agencies, and higher education. Engaging the community makes the vision more likely to be accepted and encourages the behaviors necessary to achieve the vision. As a board of education, it is your responsibility to work with the community to develop student achievement as the top priority.

Achieving such total commitment requires multiple steps. First, gather input to identify the community’s core beliefs and common values. Once those are defined, develop a process for drafting a vision statement. After the draft statement is written, test it by seeking feedback to ensure it reflects the community’s core beliefs and inspires a commitment to improving student achievement. When the vision statement is complete, the dissemination process begins.

Communicating the vision to the entire community is essential. As board members, you must articulate the vision’s main points at every opportunity, both when you are together and when you are in the community. By constantly repeating, reinforcing, and embracing these main components, you will develop the constancy of purpose necessary to sustain the vision.

This work takes persistence. Knowing that your board is committed to investing the time necessary to achieve the vision will motivate staff to be committed to working as hard and as long as necessary to be successful. Your constancy of purpose and commitment to your district’s long-term change gives staff the encouragement to try new ideas that may need time to become successful. Long-term results require long-range thinking and commitment.

Here are several key questions to ask as you work toward a shared vision for your district:

1. Do you use data to tailor solutions based on the needs and assets of each school and its community?
2. Is your accountability system based on best practice and sound research?
3. Do you embrace vigorous standards?
4. Do you recognize that sustained or pervasive underperformance cannot be tolerated?
5. Do you see that advocacy is the only way to shift state and federal policy matters from mandatory prescriptive programs to providing assistance and resources to spur innovation?
6. Are you a catalyst for innovation with a customer service approach to the education of every student?
7. Do you realize year-round or other non-traditional school calendars and extended days and years will be common in the school district of the future?
8. Do you see the need to expand innovation to business operations and infrastructure (outsourcing, facility sharing, job sharing, etc.)?
9. Do you respect the fact that parents and students have choices?
10. Do you see the need to provide a portfolio of public school options in your jurisdiction to help parents and students determine their best option?
11. What is the ideal school year?
12. What is the ideal school day?
13. Do you think the curriculum that your students need most can be taught effectively within a traditional classroom setting?
14. How much freedom should students be given in deciding when, where, and how they connect to learning?
15. How do we ensure that all children have access to the full range of connective technologies and are taught the skills necessary to use them effectively?
16. Do you educate your students with educational constructs that were created to serve the agricultural and industrial ages?

The answers to these and similar questions can help board members reflect on actions needed now to achieve the envisioned future. A well-developed and clearly articulated vision for your school system can help you see a bit farther into the distance.

Defining your vision means taking charge of your destiny. For school districts, that destiny must be improving student achievement for each and every student. Anything less can't fulfill the core mission of public education. After all, our obligation to our students is to prepare them for the world they will inherit.

Translating Vision Into Action

Your vision cannot end with a written statement. Organizations that complete the writing process and believe that they have a vision are mistaken. They have a vision statement. Writing is only the beginning. Moving the vision from paper into practice is the real challenge.

A powerful vision should guide the district's strategic planning process. A vision without a plan to achieve it is like a great movie title with no script. This is where the board starts developing a mission statement, which is the focal point of all goals, objectives, and strategies undertaken by the board, administration, and teaching and support staffs. It should be concise and understood by every district employee.

The vital nature of the statement is that it reflects the district's true mission with integrity, clarity and inspiration. To fulfill its purpose, a mission statement must be memorable and capture the purpose for which a district exists and its function. As a board develops its mission statement, it should consider the following criteria:

1. Does the statement capture the essential nature of the district's reason for being?
2. Is the statement student-oriented as opposed to being inwardly or organizationally bound?
3. Does the statement represent a relatively stable anchor point for the district, one that will not require frequent change?
4. Does the statement describe the desired result rather than focusing on activities?
5. Does the statement reflect the district's values or philosophy relevant to today and the future?

With the vision and mission statements identified, the board must create a strategic plan. This requires the board-staff leadership team to develop a process to identify goals and strategies to achieve them. Staff members subsequently are responsible for creating work plans within the strategies; reviewing the goals, strategies and work plans with the board; and reporting regularly on the progress, needs and adjustments necessary to continue moving toward the vision.

Ensuring Vision Becomes Reality

Leaders in public education can only meet today's challenges if they can clearly see the "tomorrow" they seek to create. That might sound simplistic, but it takes hard work to convert foresight into reality. Accountability means taking your fair

Sample Vision Statements

To create a school district that is focused on personalized learning so that our students will be successful in college, career, and life.

To create a school district that prepares students for what they will encounter in life beyond their K-12 experiences.

To create a school district that prepares students for our changing world.

To create a school district that is highly regarded for its academic excellence and for improving the community in which it operates.

To create a school district that produces very high levels of student achievement and helps make its community a more pleasant place to

share of responsibility for outcomes. Being accountable means that you answer not only for your actions, but also for the results of your actions. Accountability includes taking credit for achieving the desired results and accepting responsibility when targets are missed. School boards need to ensure that they do the following:

1. Establish an accountability process based on the board's strategic plan with measurable criteria and an annual review.
2. Participate in work sessions to understand accountability measures, including data analysis and how the board administration and staff should use this information.
3. Ensure that the superintendent's evaluation includes accountability measures.
4. Ensure effective and timely communications on the accountability system and progress.
5. Ensure that an annual report is developed containing data on student achievement and district performance data related to goals and standards.
6. Ensure funding for implementation of accountability measures.
7. Use student achievement results to drive decision-making.
8. Ensure compliance with state accountability measures.

Your state school boards association is a good source of expertise in assessing your mission and vision statement and also assisting with strategic planning. Because this is a complex process, it might be helpful to have an informed, objective voice to lend a different perspective.

Implementing Your Vision

Saying it and writing it down is only the beginning. School leaders who complete the writing process and believe they have a vision are mistaken. What they have is a written vision statement. Moving the vision from paper into practice is the real challenge.

A powerful vision should guide the strategic planning process for the school district. After your board and superintendent have widely disseminated the vision statement, the next step is developing a strategic plan. A beautiful vision without a plan to achieve it is like a great movie title with no script.

In creating a strategic plan, the board-staff leadership team must develop a process to identify goals that mark progress toward the vision and strategies to achieve the goals. Staff is responsible for creating work plans to implement the strategies; reviewing the goals, strategies, and work plans with the board; and reporting regularly on progress, needs, and adjustments to continue moving toward the vision.

Your vision also should influence the policies the board adopts and procedures the superintendent develops to implement the policies. School boards should consider a periodic, systematic review of policies to assure consistency with your adopted vision. That kind of check-in is worthwhile because it keeps you on track and signals to staff, students, and the community that the board is committed to its vision.

School leaders must pay close attention to the culture they create. For good or for ill, culture can permeate classrooms, directly affecting teaching and learning. The blend of school board policies and superintendent's procedures sway the district's climate.

But the content of those policies and procedures is not the only consideration. Leadership behaviors and the demeanor of the board and superintendent's staff speak volumes as you carry out your responsibilities.

Ultimately, the way board members work with each other and treat staff sets a leadership tone that affects the behaviors and attitudes of staff and students. Getting that wrong can potentially undermine the positive efforts that go

into embracing a vision.

In sum, ensuring that public education will meet emerging challenges requires a clear vision for the work and operations of school boards in the future. With that vision before us, we can shape strategies that make boards more relevant, credible, and effective leaders of public education.

“We should try to be the parents of the future, rather than the offspring of our past.”

-Miauel de Unamuno

Sample Goals and Strategies

Goal: To offer high-quality student programming so that graduates are prepared to compete in a global society.

1. Provide personalized learning for all students.
2. Support progression based on mastery of individual student goals.
3. Embrace a collaborative culture by leveraging and maximizing parent and community partnerships to support accelerated student success.
4. Create a parent scorecard for families and the community to increase transparency with regard to student and school performance.
5. Implement a plan to transition to student-based budgeting, where funding is directly tied to students and their individual needs.
6. Require students to play a key role in setting their goals along with their teachers, advisors, counselors, and parents.
7. Provide student and families with choices and meaningful opportunities to improve their school experiences.
8. Ensure all classrooms are wired global places that encourage interactivity and learning by doing.
9. Provide a curriculum that balances individualization and vetted best practices.
10. Design classroom instruction to be a hybrid of face-to-face and online.
11. Design classroom instruction according to individual learning goals and assessment for competency.
12. Ensure all classrooms are using electronic tools for instruction.
13. Utilize digital textbooks.
14. Ensure that technology proficiency and digital citizenship literacy are part of the learning experience for each student.
15. Maximize all data sources to improve instruction for students.

Sample Goals and Strategies (continued)

Goal: To provide high quality effective teachers and administrators.

1. Require teachers to frequently assess student academic growth to constantly inform their instruction.
2. Provide teachers with opportunities to network and collaborate with external organizations to enhance student learning experiences.
3. Provide teachers with research-based ideas for the most effective instructional practices.
4. Recruit, retain, and empower excellent teachers who are adept at personalizing learning experiences for students.
5. Provide principals with the autonomy to innovate and demand excellence from their faculty and staff.
6. Hold principals accountable for meaningful school improvement and rapid turnaround for chronically under-performing schools.
7. Ensure that every principal demonstrates how they provide opportunities for student, parents, and teachers to contribute their talents, skills, and experiences to support school improvement.
8. Shift the role of teachers and administrators to a focus on serving learning as collaborators.
9. Develop professional learning communities in all schools.
10. Support leadership development for aspiring, new, and veteran school leaders.
11. Partner with higher education institutions to ensure that teacher candidates are of the highest quality and aligned with district needs.
12. Transform the traditional role of the central office from a top-down management system to a system designed to provide meaningful support to schools and effective accountability for school performance.

Goal: To seek the involvement and participation of the entire community in the learning process.

1. Ensure that all schools are the center of community learning locally.
2. Leverage community assets and resources to build community schools that provide full-service supports for students and families.
3. Provide schools as a place for community convening and for citizens to acquire new knowledge and skills.

Goal: A board committed to excellence in education and aware of its responsibilities.

1. Have every board member participate in annual professional development.
2. Maintain ongoing review and development of pertinent policies.
3. Conduct at least one retreat for the entire board and superintendent each year.
4. Involve community and business leaders in the development of the board's vision and strategic plan.
5. Develop and monitor standards for student and system performance.

Next Steps

- Try the self-assessment for Vision to help determine whether your board already has processes in place to work through the components of visioning and is ready to build its vision. Perhaps your visioning process is complete and you are ready to engage in strategic planning for implementation of your vision. If so, read the next chapter on accountability or to a Key Action chapter that poses a more immediate challenge for your school board.
- In addition to the vision self-assessment, take a look at the chart of differentiated responsibilities of the board and superintendent in the vision setting process.

You'll find that succeeding chapters in this Guidebook contain similar self-assessments, charts of roles and responsibilities, and or checklists for board members and the leadership team to refer to.

Vision Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of vision and to get a sense of where you are as a board on this essential work. Indicate the degree to which your board/district/staff has achieved the following elements toward establishing a vision to improve student achievement.

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve	Don't Know/Unsure
Stakeholder representatives (school board, senior leadership, district staff, school staff, employee organizations, parents, community advocates, higher education, business leaders, and students) helped create the vision.					
As a board we have discussed the core values of our school district, supervisory union/employee groups, and community, and these values are reflected in our vision.					
Our board has established a written vision that commits to student achievement as the top priority of the school board, staff, and community.					
Our vision is clearly articulated and known to all community members who have a vested interest.					
We frequently revisit and reaffirm our vision to ensure our constancy of purpose.					
Our vision is the foundation for all long-range, strategic planning, and policy decisions.					
Our vision is the guiding force that sets the framework for how we operate as a local district and supervisory union.					
We base our resource and budget decisions on our vision. Everything we do as a board of education aligns to achieve our vision.					

Roles and Responsibilities of the School Board and Superintendent in Vision and Planning

The School Board

- Approves a strategic planning process to include the community in creating the vision for student achievement.
- Adopts the vision.
- Adopts board goals that support the vision.
- Communicates the vision.
- Keeps vision at the forefront of all decision making.
- Adopts policies needed to achieve the vision.
- Allocates resources based on the vision.
- Monitors progress toward vision.

THE SUPERINTENDENT

- Recommends a visionary strategic planning process to the board that incorporates
- participation by a broad swath of the community.
- Ensures the integrity of the planning process.
- Ensures staff development to carry out the planning process.
- Ensures the recommendations of the strategic planning team are presented to the board for action.
- Coordinates periodic review of the strategic plan.
- Ensures short- and long-range vision plans are developed and carried out at both the district and school levels.
- Develops performance indicators, based on data, to measure progress toward the board's vision for student achievement.
- Conducts work sessions with the board to increase its understanding of progress needed.
- Recommends performance indicators for board action.
- Works with the board to identify its role in supporting the vision.
- Works with the board to develop plans for carrying out its goals.
- Communicates, through the district's communications plan, the vision to the staff and community in a team approach that incorporates board participation.
- Prepares and disseminates information about progress toward the vision.
- Uses the vision to guide priority recommendations to the board.
- Uses the vision to guide decisions throughout the organization.
- Recommends policies needed to support the vision.
- Conducts periodic review with the board to identify additional policies or revise existing ones.
- Recommends resources needed to support the vision through the budgeting process.
- Conducts periodic review with the board to identify resources and funding needed.
- Brings data to the board periodically that enables the board to review student achievement progress.
- Recommends changes based on data.

Chapter 2: Accountability

School board accountability means taking your fair share of responsibility for student outcomes. Being accountable means answering not only for your actions but also for the results of your actions.

Objective: To learn how effective school boards maintain public confidence through a shared understanding of expectations, roles and responsibilities, and standards/desired results.

Higher standards and greater accountability are part and parcel of a world-class education. For superintendents, principals, teachers, and others, the stakes have changed with new evaluation systems across the country. For board members, the ultimate accountability is the vote of the community. Accountability also means transparent decision making, community support, and a willingness to consider new ideas and constructive criticism.

The demand for improvement means school boards must stay on top of changes in learning methods and curriculum. Boards must keep up with technology, staffing models, data systems, measurements of progress, and other best practices that help schools to educate our students. While this has always been the province of school boards, there is more scrutiny and much more data than ever before. Dramatic improvement is expected, even as union contracts in many states still determine, among other things, the length of the school day and year.

The school board has a clear accountability framework for assessing the quality of its schools based on progress over time. This framework goes beyond test scores to monitoring results in terms of citizenship, safety, and the arts, so all children graduate as well-rounded citizens.

Future-ready school boards have a laser focus on low-performing schools based on measurements assessing student progress over time. These boards use resources from state departments of education, universities, foundations, and state school boards associations to analyze data. With the data in hand, they tailor solutions based on the needs and strengths of each school and its community. They recognize that sustained or pervasive underperformance cannot be tolerated. They support graduated, flexible systems of intervention to improve performance while building their community's capacity to effectively govern its schools. Board members know that in extreme circumstances, such as persistent division and instability, intervention may mean the removal of local officials. Such punitive actions should include provisions to develop the community's capacity to sustain governance of its schools and return control of the schools to the community as soon as it's practical.

The word accountability means different things to different people. Most agree, though, that the goal of accountability is ensuring students achieve at the highest levels. Below are characteristics of a strong accountability structure coupled with an exploration of rigorous academic standards. Both elements are necessary components of a successful school district.

Strong Focus on Student Results

We live in an education accountability era, and that means a specific bottom line: student results. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, first passed in 2001, started a new era of student test results as the foundation of public school accountability. For many school boards, this was a new approach.

Public entities frequently measure effectiveness in terms of "inputs." In other words, how many individuals are assigned to a task or how many hours are required to complete it? The size of the investment is meant to imply a cause-and-effect relationship. When more resources are invested in a task or initiative, the participants do a better job.

Sometimes results are described in "outputs." Thus, a checklist of tasks accomplished or work projects completed is offered as evidence of being accountable. The number of completed activities is an indicator of a job well done. A school

district example of an output measure could be doubling the number of after-school tutorials. Whether the tutorials actually result in improved achievement is not part of the equation.

Both approaches are overly simplistic for evaluating public education. Accountability involves looking at the quality of results. It is not just about what actions you take, but also the difference those actions make for students.

True accountability occurs when district reporting goes beyond mere inputs and outputs. Hence, a key outcome for districts is being results oriented, and staying focused on measuring improved student achievement.

Success Measured by Improved Student Achievement

How we measure student success has changed significantly. Clear standards in conjunction with explicit measures that determine mastery now are customary yardsticks for defining student achievement results.

Traditionally, individual student success was measured by comparing a student's performance to the performance of others. What quartile did the student fall into? What stanine? What percentile? Was the student in the top half of the class? The top 10 percent?

Ranking student work (both formally and informally) was common practice in the past. We all remember "grading on a curve." Such a perspective guarantees winners and losers. Some students will always come out at the top, some in the middle, and some at the bottom. This helps you compare relative performance, but it is not a measure of accountability.

A student could be in the bottom of a group's performance and still be very competent. Conversely, a classmate could have the best performance in the group and yet not be competent. The question is not how students perform compared to others. Rather, it is how each student performs compared to officially established performance standards.

Individual student results are commonly measured against expectations set by clearly defined standards (as discussed below). Educators must be able to answer the question: **"Has this student mastered the knowledge and skills expected for academic success?"**

School board members, in their governance role, might want to ask the question: **"What percentage of our students have achieved mastery?"** To answer these questions, districts must have explicit standards and a solid assessment structure in place to measure how students are meeting those standards.

Accountability Questions the School Board Should Ask Itself

- How do we ensure that our policy and budget decisions are research-based and data-driven?
- How do we recognize and reward students, teachers, and schools that meet or exceed student performance standards?
- What are the consequences and interventions for students, teachers, and schools that have not met standards?
- How are achievement measures and results reported to teachers, parents, and the public?
- What role do student achievement results play in the evaluation of the superintendent?
- How does the school board evaluate itself in terms of student achievement?

Accountability Questions the School Board Should Ask the Superintendent and Staff

- Do we have an information system that provides adequate data for accountability?
- How do staff and students learn what is expected of them?
- How is success or failure assessed?

What are the system's rewards and consequences

- for success and failure?
- How do student achievement results factor into staff evaluations?

Ultimately, though, final accountability rests with the school board. As the legal district representatives and as leaders who establish the vision and policies, school board members are responsible for the outcomes – good or bad.

Standards

Standards are the foundation of a school district’s learning system. They provide educators with a unifying theme for classroom instruction, assessments, and use of resources. Standards are approved at the state level and conveyed to local districts.

In discussing standards, board members must know how to explain to the public what the district expects each child to know and be able to do – at each grade level. That is, you must describe the specific content and skills students are expected to master. This is the “what” of standards. A related concept is defining student performance by determining the level of proficiency we expect students to meet. This is the “how high” of standards.

Excellent standards:

- Help teachers and principals set priorities for use of instructional time.
- Provide a measure for identifying students who need extra or different instructional support to succeed.
- Establish consistent expectations for academic performance, allowing all children to be challenged and receive a quality education.

The most effective standards, in other words, help determine “how well” you expect students to achieve. Ideally, expectations are described in simple terms with no education jargon.

Performance standards must always allow parents, students, community members, and staff to recognize whether students have grasped the desired knowledge and skills.

School Board Responsibilities

Mandatory state standards do not relieve local systems of their responsibility to develop district-level standards. It is certainly not the board members’ role to define learning standards. This highly technical, professional work rests with the superintendent and staff. It is, however, the board’s role to ensure this process takes place.

The rigor and complexity of state standards varies and can be viewed by districts as a floor rather than a ceiling. School boards can adopt standards that are stricter than the state version, but cannot enact weaker provisions. It is worth remembering that criticism of public education and a call for national education legislation was the result of school boards and district leadership failing to establish their own standards.

Two important questions stand out:

- How do we ensure that the standard is the right one?
- What should board members look for while exercising their governance role of reviewing and approving standards?

Reaching for the stars is one thing; branding as failures all who cannot touch the stars is quite another. We all want to raise the bar, but setting it at an unattainable height only will create frustration and defeat. Adults sometimes forget

what it is like to be a third-grader. Many have an inflated view of what they actually knew and could do at that point in their life.

In fact, even though politicians have the power to legislate education standards, only a few have ever attempted to test themselves. School board members might consider taking the actual student assessments. That simple act can help build understanding of what you are asking children to know and do. It also can serve as a reality check.

Constructing Excellent Standards

Vague standards make it hard to hold anyone accountable. Board members, in their oversight role, should work with district educators to make sure local standards are clear and specific. Without clarity, teachers are left to use individual judgments about whether students have met a standard.

On the other hand, well-developed standards include expected student performance alongside examples of student work and evaluative comments. That approach provides clear guidance for teachers about how to spend instructional time, how to evaluate students' progress, and what feedback is needed for students to be successful.

When school boards and educators unite around well-developed standards, parents can see concrete examples of what their child is expected to learn. Most important, students can see what is required of them.

A Changing World

Just as we can err on the side of setting standards too high, we can also end up setting standards so low they become meaningless, particularly with schools and districts that serve a large number of low-income students. Educators and school boards may not have sufficiently high expectations for student performance in these communities, which translates to lower standards. School boards need to be aware of and face these challenges with innovation, implementation of best practices, and all due sensitivity.

Without the proper academic rigor, students will find it hard to succeed in the competitive world they will enter. School boards must be aggressive in promoting equity and educational excellence for all students – regardless of their personal circumstances. Standards are an essential step.

School districts, therefore, need to examine their local standards to ensure they reflect our constantly changing world. The aim is for students to be able to demonstrate acquired skills and knowledge. In short, competency can replace seat time as the standard criteria for graduation. Faulty standards that are not aligned with the competitive workplace do a disservice to both our students and society.

School boards cannot establish a successful standards-based education system without support. If teachers do not embrace the standards, they will not prepare students to meet them. If parents do not understand and support the standards, they cannot help their children meet them. Likewise, if the community does not back the standards, taxpayers and others will not provide the resources necessary for schools to prepare students to meet them.

Mutually agreed-upon standards define those expectations and set consistent levels of performance for all students. Standards are the foundation of quality education programs.

Student, School, and District Data Are Publicly Reported in an Easy-to-Understand Format

Assessment results are most useful when provided to parents in a clear and timely manner. The reporting format can include cumulative data that track the student's progress from year to year. Parents then can see clearly how their child's performance compares to district standards.

Parents are more informed if they receive information comparing their child's performance to other students in the:

- School
- District
- State
- Nation

Most important, schools can let parents know about options for getting additional help if their child's performance does not meet the standards. They might also be told how suggested interventions work to move their child toward proficiency.

The type of data that is routinely collected and what information must by law be shared can vary dramatically from state to state. School board members who are mindful of legal obligations and best practices can design a strategy that works for their local circumstances.

Student Data Are Analyzed by Improvement, Not Just Results

Multiple data can be collected and analyzed from many perspectives. Certainly, proficiency — how students perform in relation to district and state standards — must be measured. But that's not nearly enough. School districts need to measure how much academic improvement every student makes each year. Measuring growth is as important as measuring proficiency in constructing a reliable accountability structure. Growth is a more significant measure of school and classroom effectiveness than proficiency alone.

The accountability process also must allow data users to determine if progress varies among student subgroups. Breaking data down by race, gender, socioeconomic status, and other factors is essential to identifying different success rates. Educators refer to the process as "disaggregation."

Looking at data by group allows good instructors to pinpoint where additional help is needed. Also, it is important to disaggregate data on which students are receiving instructional interventions as well as the results.

Accountability Is Motivation for Continuous Improvement

Often, accountability is viewed negatively. It is blamed for raising anxiety among teachers. Some parents are concerned that high-stakes tests create undue anxiety among children. They believe schools create pressure that is too intense for children, especially younger students.

Some schools spend the prior weeks before high-stakes tests in drill and preparation. In addition to increasing student anxiety, these practices are boring. Typically they involve students in rote repetition of critical assessment items. Such practices do not represent the intent of a sound accountability structure.

Research by the National Center for Educational Achievement found that low-performing districts depend on teachers alone to determine daily student mastery and to get students ready for high-stakes annual tests. Consequently, school and district leadership have no clear idea of how prepared students are for the exams. More important, there can be no systemic intervention strategies beyond the individual teacher's efforts.

The same research found that high-performing districts are equally dependent on the daily monitoring of mastery by the classroom teacher; however, they do not stop there. Beyond their individual judgment, teachers at the same grade level develop common assessments that test all students in the school. Results are shared among the teachers and collaborative strategies are implemented when students need additional support.

At the district level, assessments measure and compare student mastery to learning standards. Schools monitor how common assessments can predict results on the district mastery measures. The district monitors how measures predict results on the state tests. This type of robust accountability structure informs instruction for everyone in the district.

If school districts and staff sincerely believe that accountability promotes a quality education, they will not create a negative environment for assessments. In fact, the comprehensive internal accountability process will be so good that the high-stakes state assessments will merely serve as an external confirmation – validating what districts already know about their students.

This component is not easy to execute but it is essential to an effective accountability process. If individual teachers, principals, and other staff members must be held accountable for student results, staff’s impact on learning must be measured in a fair way. An accountability process must consider where each student begins as well as the end results. Two students can end the year at the same achievement level, but they may have started at different places.

Many factors contribute to student success or failure. Students arrive at school with very different backgrounds. Some have abundant advantages, while others struggle with burdens that impede their chances for success.

Successful boards have a laser focus on low-performing schools based on measurements assessing student performance over time. These boards access resources from state departments of education, universities, foundations, and state school boards associations to analyze data. They tailor solutions based on the needs and assets of each school and its community. They recognize that sustained or pervasive underperformance cannot not be tolerated, and they support graduated, flexible systems of intervention to improve performance.

Accountability Does Not Limit the Education Experience

One criticism of standardized testing is that it limits overall learning opportunities for students. Schools are criticized for having a narrowly focused program of studies that translate into “teaching to the test.” Critics believe only tested content is being taught to most students. They worry that struggling students are being denied arts, physical education, and other elective subjects. These critics say the state assessment programs are counterproductive to providing a quality education for children.

School boards must take a leadership role in ensuring that their districts maintain a robust and rigorous instructional program. Certainly, responsible leaders have high expectations for achievement for all students and these expectations are clarified through well-defined curricula and programs. What about schools or districts that do not have those high expectations? How do they ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn?

Planning Team Considerations for Developing an Accountability Plan

1. What process will we use to determine if the following components are present in our system of accountability?

- Clear accountability for each and every student
- Clear indication of student proficiency
- Method for determining annual student academic growth or improvement
- Capacity to disaggregate student results by race, gender, socioeconomics, or other identifiable groups
- Capacity to measure school effectiveness
- Capacity to tie student progress to individual teachers
- Capacity to incorporate student results as part of staff evaluation

2. What’s our timeline for first steps, and how can we determine what’s a reasonable timeframe for having a system of accountability in place?

3. How will we involve teachers, parents, and community members in the accountability process?

National and state accountability measures are a means of protecting students and parents from low expectations in public education. This does not mean those measures are the *only* goal for student learning. Students in high-quality districts will excel beyond the minimum standards set by the state.

In a high-quality district:

- Learning experiences are never limited to the “tested” measures.
- Extensive educational options are available to students not only within the core subject areas but also visual and performing arts, health and physical education, and technology and career opportunities.
- Boards examine the relationship of standards, data, and accountability to the district’s strategic plan.

Great leaders keep their priorities in focus by constantly asking themselves: “**How is this decision going to improve student performance?**” They then analyze the data to monitor the effectiveness of their decisions. Success is recognized and rewarded. Lack of success drives visible change and improvement efforts.

Genuine accountability uses data as a tool, not a weapon. When leaders use data to threaten or punish, we resist examining data for fear of negative findings and consequences. True accountability is about using data to inform and improve. Data that is used as feedback to decide best actions, alignment of resources, and next steps sets the stage for real improvement. School boards must consistently ask themselves if they are accountable for student results. If not boards, then who?

One other point is worth making: Board members would be well served to familiarize themselves with the accountability measures and actions that apply to staff. Are you willing to be held to these same standards, particularly in terms of ethics, code of conduct, and operating protocols and norms?

For too long, others have defined accountability in a narrow, punitive way. Successful school boards use accountability systems as a positive vehicle to demonstrate best practice, sound research, and adherence to rigorous standards.

Accountability and Alignment Are Not Mutually Exclusive

When resources, thinking, planning, and execution are aligned, everything goes more smoothly. Knowing where others stand, what they are thinking, and what we are trying to accomplish makes the work easier and more fulfilling. Alignment fosters a real sense of accomplishment. If alignment enhances productivity and progress, what will help boards and school systems practice it? A good place to begin is by establishing clarity and consensus about system goals and priorities. Alignment is enhanced when the board, working with the superintendent, staff, and community, establishes clear goals and priorities reflecting community expectations as well as state and federal requirements.

Another key consideration for the board as it pursues alignment is resource allocation. Nothing conveys what is important to a school board more than the budget it adopts. The traditional thinking about school budgets holds that 93 percent of the typical district budget is driven by fixed costs such as transportation, salary, and benefits. That leaves about 7 percent available to the board to achieve its vision and goals for improving student achievement. As with most bits of conventional wisdom, there is some truth to this observation. It is also true that how you use those discretionary resources will determine how closely you can come to achieving your stated goals. Asking the superintendent to align his or her budgetary recommendations based on his and the staff’s needs analysis and priorities can begin a fruitful conversation and emphasize the board’s determination to make deliberate budgetary decisions.

Your use of resources sends a message to staff, parents, and community leaders as to what is most important and that you are serious about your role in making those decisions. Ensuring alignment also means you are willing to eliminate programs and positions that are not critical to achieving the district’s goals. Keeping this alignment requirement front and center enables the board to ask “big picture” questions about what is being proposed and how it supports program

and student performance goals. It also sends an important message to the community that the board is serious about accountability and will examine each program and proposal on its merits and ability to contribute to the district's achievement of its vision. Boards can only find alignment through decision-making driven by facts and focus, not by politics and perceptions. Ultimately, the board sets the example for alignment for the district. Alignment begins in the board room.

With new initiatives, increased focus, and stronger accountability, public education is at a crossroads. At this time of division between so-called education "reformers" and "traditionalists," school boards must play an integral role. It is the responsibility of boards to live up to these new expectations, while defending their authority and unique status between themselves and their communities. Boards are in the best seats to determine what the best methods are for ensuring our young citizens achieve at the highest levels.

Next Steps

- Try Accountability Self-Assessment to get a sense of where you are as a board on this key action.
- In addition to the self-assessment, take a look at the chart of differentiated roles of the board and superintendent as they relate to Accountability.

Accountability Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of accountability and to get a sense of where you are as a board on this essential work. Indicate the degree to which your board/district/staff has achieved the following elements toward establishing measures of accountability to improve student achievement.

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve	Don't Know/Unsure
Our district publishes an annual report of progress.					
Our annual report includes data on student achievement and district performance related to district goals and standards.					
The format of our report is consistent from year to year and includes data from prior years.					
We compare our data with data from other districts that are similar to ours.					
We examine our data by gender, race, and socioeconomic status to measure the success of all students.					
We use our student achievement data to make decisions and establish district priorities.					
We communicate to the public how our decisions are linked to student achievement data.					
Principals and teachers use student achievement data to make decisions and set instructional priorities.					
We use our student achievement data to plan staff development and to recognize and reward teacher performance.					
We tie evaluations of staff and ourselves as board members to student achievement results.					

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Accountability

The School Board

- Establishes an accountability process with measurable criteria, and assures an annual review.
- Participates in work sessions to understand accountability measures, including data analysis; and how the board, administration, and staff should use this information.
- Ensures that the superintendent's evaluation includes accountability measures.
- Recognizes and rewards teachers who consistently produce greater-than-average student improvement gains.
- Supports the superintendent's recommendation for dismissal or nonrenewal when warranted.
- Ensures effective and timely communications on the accountability system and progress.
- Ensures funding to implement accountability measures.
- Evaluates itself on board goals related to student achievement.
- Uses student achievement results to drive decision making.
- Ensures compliance to state accountability measures
- Ensures that parents receive annual, personalized data on their children's achievement
- Ensures staff training in use of data and other accountability measures.
- Works with the board to identify accountability measures to be used in the superintendent's evaluation.
- Identifies a program to recognize teachers who consistently produce greater-than-average gains.
- Carries out the recognition program.
- Develops a process to identify teachers whose students consistently fail to make expected gains.
- Analyzes data and other accountability measures and presents explanation in a "user friendly" way to the board and to the community.
- Communicates, through the district's communications plan, use of and progress with, accountability measures to improve student achievement.
- Assures an annual report is developed containing data on student achievement and district performance data related to goals and standards.
- Presents budget recommendations and rationale to the board.
- Works with board to develop its evaluation process.
- Reports all information related to improved student achievement and makes recommendations for needed changes.
- Makes the board aware of any state-mandated reporting requirements for student learning.
- Ensures adherence at district and school levels.
- Shares data concerning state mandates with the board.
- Develops a system for providing parents with cumulative data that clearly trace individual progress from year-to-year and show progress in comparison with district standards.
- Ensures a system to provide parents whose students fail with information on district resources and available alternatives to help their student meet district standards.

The Superintendent

- Recommends an accountability process to the board based on the district's strategic plan, standards, and other important factors.
- Leads an annual review of the accountability process, and recommends changes based on student performance.
- Ensures data and accountability measures are used at district/school level to set instructional priorities.
- Ensures staff evaluations are linked to accountability measures.
- Requires professional development on the accountability process.
- Plans periodic training for the board on accountability measures, including the use and application of data.

Chapter 3: Board Operations and Policy

Policy permeates and dominates all aspects of school operations. It also presents the most powerful lever for the exercise of leadership.

Objective: To learn how effective school boards use policy to remain accountable to citizens for the governance and management of schools and to explore how visionary policy can support the district's educational mission and philosophy.

The school board's purpose is to establish policies, programs, and procedures that create the foundation for students' academic achievement. The board is equally responsible for managing district resources wisely.

Board members fulfill these policy responsibilities in two main ways: functioning as a deliberative body that articulates and adopts policy, and selecting an executive officer to implement policy. Effective school boards evaluate the results of their efforts and pursue their functions openly, seeking the involvement and contributions of the public, students, and staff in the decision making process.

A school board's primary role is to adopt a vision, and a highly effective board is accountable to multiple stakeholders. However, vision without action is a dream, and action without vision is aimless. Boards must do even more.

Board policy represents the intersection of vision and accountability. Implemented well and in context, board policy directs other elements of the key work — community leadership and board/superintendent relationships.

What Is Board Policy?

Developing visionary board policies is important school board work. These written documents guide the direction of the district and provide tools that prompt prudent change. As discussed in Chapter 2, the board is ultimately accountable to its citizens for the way schools are governed and managed, and ultimately, the results achieved. Policies establish the parameters within which the district operates. Therefore, a cogent and articulate vision is critical.

Specific board policies exist for several reasons. They are primarily derived from legal precedents or rules. In some cases, however, policies serve as specific operating principles designed to address local needs. Most are drafted as preemptive guidance, anticipating the myriad challenges a district may face. A smaller number are developed in response to an unanticipated threat or emerging opportunity.

Regardless of the motivation, in terms of governance, it is clear that boards who lead by policy are more likely to address the most significant issues. Leadership through policy offers the opportunity to:

- Use this powerful tool to align the school district's actions to meet the board's vision
- Consider the big picture for your district.
- Lead others to think big about how to drive student achievement — the true work of school boards.

Policy governance is not simply updating the policy manual once every few years. Boards have constant opportunities to shape, mold, and modify their community's future through discussion, debate, and thoughtful consideration of important issues contained in board policy. Boards with a thorough understanding of policy development and implementation can be powerfully effective.

On the other hand, a board that neglects the evolution of its policies, is not keenly mindful of their value, or fails to clearly communicate its policies will diminish its leadership potential. That board also essentially abdicates its authority.

Operating as a Cohesive Management Team

Well-crafted policies are broad enough to give school administrators flexibility in handling day-to-day problems, yet specific enough to provide clear guidance. Board policy should not be confused with administrative regulations. Regulatory guidelines are more operational in nature.

Many school boards maintain a parallel system of policy and regulations, but those that are most effective know the difference and concentrate their efforts on policy development. This allows the board to concentrate on work that shapes the future while embodying the concept of “the management team,” allowing administrators to carry out the tasks appropriate for their roles in the district.

Board Policy vs Administrative Guidelines	
Policy “The who, what and why” <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sets goals• Resolves issues • Defines and aligns administrative responsibilities• Establishes oversight and evaluation procedures	Guidelines/Regulations “The how” <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports and implements board policy• Provides direction for administrative decisions and district procedures• Generally designed by administrators

By focusing on policy content, a board can gain control over important district issues and reduce the risk of micromanaging. Boards engrossed in day-to-day operations cannot provide the big-picture leadership necessary to improve schools. From a higher vantage point, the board can deal with fundamental, long-term issues that require the wisdom of a diverse body of community representatives studiously considering what’s best for all students.

A board dedicated to strong organizational policies understands that it is not responsible for managing, but fully embraces the responsibility to govern. Policy is a leadership tool with no equal in helping the district achieve academic excellence for students. For a board to maximize its effectiveness, it must carefully discern and identify issues that require its attention. While administrative issues and other side roads can be alluring, ultimately they do not have the same impact on the district’s mission or vision.

Effective boards concentrate their time and resources only on the issues that rise to the level of policy and governance, and items that further the district’s vision. Responsibility for carrying out policy rests with the superintendent or chief executive officer (CEO). Sometimes principals or other employees are delegated such responsibility, but the board ultimately holds the superintendent/CEO accountable for ensuring policy is implemented.

What Strong Policies Achieve

A board with sound written policies that are being faithfully implemented has a solid defense against challenges to its authority. A board with poorly written policies that are not accurately implemented will eventually encounter many preventable problems, and is taking a needless risk with its authority.

Boards that lack written policies might also be accused of governing inconsistently. For example, consider a decision made involving the request of a well-liked individual that differs from a similar request by an average citizen, student, or employee. Failure to develop policies leaves interpretation open to the memories of board members, administrators and other personnel.

What Effective Policies Accomplish

The most effective policies:

- Establish a legal record.
- Provide for fair, reasonable, consistent, and objective treatment of issues.
- Establish a procedure for handling problems.
- Save time and effort by eliminating the need to make a new decision each time a recurring situation arises.
- Eliminate or sharply reduce crisis decision making.
- Tend to reduce pressures of special interest groups.
- Aid boards in appraising district educational services.
- Aid in the orientation of new board and staff members.
- Help keep the community and staff informed of board philosophy and action.
- Enhance school-community relations and staff morale by getting the public and employees involved in developing policies.
- Improve board-superintendent-staff relationships.
- Provide a means for staff members to assess their individual roles within the framework of the district's overall operation.
- Provide documentation that the board is running a business-like operation.
- Give credence to board action.
- Foster stability and continuity.

Powerful policy aims to advance the district on a steady path toward attaining the board-adopted vision, mission, and goals. Indeed, boards should review key policies for consistency with the vision, and adjust accordingly. While each policy reflects the board's adopted will after much review and debate, the final result serves as an ironclad guideline for action by the administration, staff, and the board itself.

Knowledge Matters

Over the long haul, a board with well-written policies has better education programs and staff accountability. As policymakers, the school board members of tomorrow need to develop skills in decision-making, communications, organizational structure, personnel relations, leadership, and public relations.

All board members need to be aware of problems, issues, and needs that require policy solutions. Board members should stay current by keeping up with reading professional journals such as state association and NSBA publications, consulting state school boards associations, attending national, state, and regional conferences, and discussing issues with as many different groups as possible.

Being proactive and developing policies before they are urgently needed allows the board to debate and determine an issue's merit without the pressure of heightened emotions and time limits. In a crisis, the demands of administrators or citizens for quick action can lead the board to make a hasty decision. If you have questions about your policies or need sample policies to adapt and modify, contact your state school boards association for further exploration, professional development and assistance. The Key Work section of the NSBA website (www.nsba.org) also has sample policies, vision statements, sample agendas, planning calendars, and other companion resources.

Policy Implementation and Monitoring

Policy development is a constant process that requires diligence by both the board and administration. Policies need constant review by the board to determine if they are working, comply with state and federal laws, and represent the district's needs. Policy monitoring includes the responsibility to ensure that, taken together, the board's policy and the superintendent's administrative procedures yield results to move the school district toward the board's vision.

School boards have the authority to adopt policy, and the ongoing responsibility to ensure that those directives are functioning as expected. Effective boards continually monitor results and ask the questions: *Are we getting what we wanted? Is the policy consistently enforced with board action?* A board with sound written policies has a solid defense against challenges to its authority. A board with poorly written or implemented

policies will eventually encounter many preventable problems and is taking a needless risk with its authority.

Failing to meet policy responsibility could cause both operational and legal consequences. For example, defending an outdated policy that violates current law could be a futile quest in court. Conversely, having a faithfully and fairly executed policy is often the key to getting a case dismissed or prevailing in a longer proceeding.

Boards may monitor by internal report, external report, or by district board inspection. With internal reports, the superintendent shares compliance information with the board. The report should include information about how well the policy is working, penalties that have resulted from violations, and the extent to which expected results are being accomplished. External review involves a disinterested third party who may be selected by the board to assess compliance with board policies and provides reports. The board also may receive information from parents or other citizens about how policies are working. Board inspection, by contrast, grants board members the authority to assess compliance with the appropriate policy criteria based upon their own experience or direct observation.

One common technique for staying up to date is to evaluate a certain number of key policies at every regular board meeting. This evaluation also serves as a reminder of the board's central role as policymaker and helps both veteran and new board members, along with stakeholders at every level, realize how much thought goes into each policy.

Matching Policy to Mission and Goals

The intentional matching of policy to district mission and goals is crucial in effective policy analysis. It seems obvious that mission, policies, and goals should go hand in hand, but that's not always the case. Keeping the mission statement and district goals in mind as you review a particular policy might reveal little or no correlation or even a negative impact.

Remember, board policy sets the standard. If no standards are set, none will be met. At the same time, it is not enough for a board to adopt what it considers to be excellent policies. It must ensure that board policies are working and being accurately implemented.

To be successful, boards should seek to concentrate their collective efforts on policymaking and planning responsibilities. Policies should provide the superintendent with sufficient and adequate guidelines for implementing board goals and striving to achieve the board's vision of the future. The board must maintain effective communication with the school community, staff, and students to remain aware of attitudes, opinions, desires, and ideas. The results are well worth the effort.

Ensuring Policy Leadership

The extent to which boards govern through policy varies greatly. Boards that most effectively govern will:

1. Refuse to consider issues that have already been settled in policy.
2. React quickly and decisively when policy is not followed.
3. Require the superintendent to develop administrative procedures with citations to appropriate board policies.
4. Delete items that should be in administrative procedures.
5. Adopt a policy review protocol that ensures the board's entire policy manual is reviewed annually.
6. Schedule policy agenda issues throughout the year, including reports on how policies are working.
7. Review permissive authority under the law to determine whether certain actions are needed.

Next Steps:

- Take a look at the suggested questions to ask during policy development. How thorough is your board/superintendent leadership team in addressing these questions as part of your policy adoption or amendment process?
- Refer to the suggested checklist of Key Work Policy areas to help make the connection of how your policymaking authority should be a consideration in all aspects of school operations.

Questions to Ask During Policy Development or Amendment

Use this tool when considering the adoption or amendment of any board policy

Drafting and Changing Policy

Consider these aspects when drafting new policy or revising a current one:

1. Does the policy use simple language?
2. Is it based on current law?
3. Is the policy comprehensive, practical, and consistent?
4. Is the policy repetitive?
5. Is it current?

Debating Policy

In evaluating policy changes, the board should discuss all foreseeable issues:

1. Do we understand the problem or issue?
2. How has this issue been handled in the past?
3. Where does this issue fit into our mission, goals, and budget?
4. Do we have a choice?
5. Is the issue covered by other authority?
6. What do we want from this policy?
7. Have we received an analysis of how the policy affects various individuals or groups?
8. Who is responsible for carrying out the policy?

Inviting Public Comment

The board should engage in thorough and thoughtful discussion involving at least these four questions:

1. Does the policy language specify what the board wants and who is supposed to carry it out?
2. Does the policy identify measurable outcomes or objectives?
3. Will the policy create implementation problems?
4. Does the policy need to be reviewed by the board's attorney?

Final Questions

Here are some final questions to ponder before the policy is adopted:

1. Are measurable outcomes established based on the feedback we have received?
2. Have we set a date when the superintendent will report to the board on how the policy is working?
3. Have we told the superintendent what information we want?
4. Are the administrative procedures that have been developed sufficient?

Policies that may be considered in the five elements of the Key Work of School Boards

Policy missing Policy outdated Policy up to date

Vision

ADA	Educational Philosophy			
EA	Support Services Goals			
FA	Facilities Development Goals			
GA	Personnel Policies Goals			
IA	Instructional Goals			
JA	Student Policies Goals			
KA	School-Community Relations Goals			
LA	Education Agency Goals			

Accountability

AF	Commitment to Accomplishment			
AFA	Evaluation of School Board Operational Procedures			
AG	Reporting Accomplishments to the Public			
OI	Fiscal Accounting and Reporting			
ESJ	Evaluation of Support Services			
IM	Evaluation of Instructional Programs			

Policy and Board Operations

BA	Board Operation Goals			
BF	Board Policy Development and Adoption			
BFA	Policy Development System			
CH	Policy Implementation			

Community Leadership

AB	The People and Their School District			
ABA	Community Involvement in Decision Making			
IB	Public Information Program			
ID	Public Participation in Board Meetings			
IL	Public Complaints			
IM	Relations with Community Organizations			
IN	Relations with Governmental Authorities			
LB	Relations with Other Schools and Educational Institutions			

Board of superintendent relationships

BCD	Board-Superintendent Relationship			
CHD	Administration in Policy Absence			

Chapter 4: Community Leadership

Effective boards recognize public schooling's impact on the community, and understand how strong connections mean everyone is invested in successful schools.

Objective: To learn how effective school boards employ the art of influence -- through legislation and strategic engagement, to generate public and parental support.

Community engagement. Promotion. Whatever term you prefer, it is one of the main school board governance functions. Promotion is interpreting the board's concerns and actions to the public and the public's concerns to the board. It involves building public support necessary to implement the board's vision. In essence, promotion is community leadership. Board members should always be better informed about school issues than the general public and make decisions based on facts and data, not public opinion. The best board members create public opinion, not react to it. The most effective board does not leave to chance the promotion of its schools and school district. Rather, it has a plan for promotion that involves all school board members, staff, and students. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community. They also establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholder in setting and achieving district goals.

The Board's Advocacy Role: An Overview

You have an important message to deliver. School board members must therefore learn the tactics of politics and lobbying if they are going to be successful advocates.

Advocacy is defined as the act of speaking or writing in favor of a particular position, cause, or belief. School board members must be advocates for: children, public education, lifelong learning, excellence and equity, and parent involvement. At all times you must focus on what's best for children.

In their advocacy roles, school board members should recognize the essential link between educational excellence and the community's economic and social health. Good boards should be the catalyst for community discussion and action on issues affecting children and youth. Of course, local decision making means greater accountability. Unlike state and federal policymakers who legislate mandates from afar, you are up close and personal with your constituency. You get questioned at school events, on ball fields, at the supermarket. People know your phone number and where you live.

At the same time, it's important to remember that school boards are unique because their mission is solely devoted to student learning. Education is not just a line item in your budget, but the only item, a claim that state legislators, mayors, county commissioners, and other elected officials can't make. Unlike corporations and nonprofit association, school boards have statutory authority and responsibility. In many states, boards raise tax revenue with the public's consent.

You also have research on your side. The Iowa Association of School Boards' Lighthouse Study shows clearly that school boards matter and are integral to student achievement. Over time, however, state and federal mandates increasingly have erodes the authority of local officials to make decisions on behalf of their schools. That's one reason becoming a better advocate for your schools and your students is so critical. You must capitalize on your influence as public officials and show you are a champion of public education, not just for your district or special interests, but for all students.

Working With Legislators

Becoming an effective advocate at the state level requires you to know three things: the legislator, the legislation, and the process. Get to know your legislators from your home district and meet with them to discuss education issues before each session begins. Make yourself an accurate and credible source of information. Know the whole issue by calculating who it affects, how others feel about it, and what impact it will make in the future, both in your district and statewide.

A legislator's time is limited, so you must know the issue and have facts available to support your position. Get to the core of the issue and present your information clearly and concisely. Explain what you want and why.

At the same time, understanding the steps a bill goes through to become a law is critical in your advocacy efforts. Your input can be valuable when bills are proposed, during committee discussions, floor debate and conference committee consideration, and when the bill reaches the governor's desk. Be careful to target your best efforts to the right person at the right time.

Community Engagement/Promotion

Community engagement is central to the board's leadership role. Governance in the age of public accountability cannot use the script, "We're the professionals; we'll tell you what you need to know." As the district's governors, board members come into office knowing they represent the community that put them there.

In a deliberate, ongoing way, effective boards establish and maintain protocols and processes that seek community involvement and commitment to public schools. That approach is an effective strategy in balancing competing interests and forging a consensus within the district and wider community. Part of that approach is effective meetings.

Working alone will not create and sustain increased student performance. To solve complex challenges, actively seek multiple perspectives and experiences. Collaboration encourages joint ownership of the problem and usually results in better solutions. Meaningful collaboration is easier said than done. Involving others is difficult because it requires going beyond simply sharing *your* knowledge or persuading others to accept *your* goals. Critics often scoff at committees and other efforts to gain widespread feedback, but collaboration does have proven value.

Effective boards recognize how student performance affects the community, and understand that everyone has a stake in successful schools. Individuals contribute through their tax dollars, of course. But looking from an economic and civic standpoint, they are equally invested in seeing well-educated graduates who will become contributing members of society. School boards that are effective at community engagement engender broad support for necessary funding, even in difficult financial times. Collaboration has other benefits, such as giving schools additional social, emotional, and experiential resources that can raise student achievement to heights unattainable by principals and teachers working alone.

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement is the engine of good collaboration between the school and the community. Parents need meaningful roles in the school, and must know their voices are heard and their input valued. Today’s climate of public accountability demands greater parent involvement. Significant long-term efforts to improve student achievement cannot be accomplished without their buy-in and support. When parents have high expectations for their children, students will act accordingly.

Help parents understand clearly what is happening in the school so they can reinforce the importance of doing well. Parents who believe in the district’s education goals and performance standards become invaluable allies. However, building collaborative relationships requires roles that go beyond helping in the media center, baking for cookie sales, and chaperoning field trips. Parents contribute directly to increased student achievement when they assist with learning activities at home and at school, tutor those who need additional support, or help prepare instructional materials.

“Local school board governance is a catalyst. Only local governance provides a constant source of leadership within schools and communities that motivates, persuades, and inspires people to want more for students. The will for excellence cannot be mandated from afar. People must be inspired to want excellence for themselves. That takes leadership conversations that create a sense of urgency, hold forth high expectations, and paint a clear picture and vision of what is possible—beyond the status quo. You provide those leadership conversations every month at the board table, as a centering point for the superintendent and staff. You can provide them every day in your conversations with parents, neighbors, and community leaders.”

Lisa Bartusek, executive director, Iowa Association of School Boards

Business and Political Engagement

While every citizen is a potential partner, successful districts make special efforts to connect with business and political leaders. These potential partners have much to say about the resources and requirements schools must meet, and they have a significant interest in school success.

Effective boards and superintendents encourage and welcome business participation in district initiatives, including setting standards, assessment, and accountability. Involving business leaders strengthens systematic planning processes because it adds both expertise and credibility.

Many board members are themselves successful in business, but you benefit from other perspectives on district issues and processes. Professionals in medicine, law, agriculture, manufacturing, ranching,

construction trades, and other fields of expertise all have something to offer to school districts. Confident boards ask community volunteers to review district operations in their areas of expertise and give great weight to the feedback received. Board members should not feel obliged to agree with every recommendation, but should engage in an open analysis and public discussion.

Public Participation

Open meetings laws in states require school boards to deliberate and act in public. None, however, require public participation. While board meetings are public meetings, no individual has a “right” to speak, any more than he or she has the right to address the state legislature or Congress while they are in session.

Most school boards do set aside time during each meeting for public comment. The board should have a policy on public participation at meetings that establishes procedures for gaining a place on the agenda and a method for controlling remarks made at the meeting. For example, the person speaking should identify himself and state the reason for addressing the board.

School board meetings often are a lightning rod for controversy. A board must expect it when dealing with controversial issues such as school closings, labor contracts, employee grievances, re-zoning and many other issues that alter the routines of students and staff. The board can’t prevent controversy, but it can, through proper planning and action at the meeting, control the effects. Firm board procedures are essential for board hearings and meetings when angry citizens descend upon the board.

Speakers should be held to the same time limit, unless a special reason exists for making an exception. The board’s priority is to conduct an orderly and efficient session. Local governing bodies may establish and enforce rules and regulations for individual conduct at public meetings. To require otherwise would be to permit any person to destroy the effectiveness of local government by monopolizing its time at public meetings and disrupt the business that must be conducted.

Board Self-Governance

The school board meeting is the community’s window to the school system. The public often will assume schools are run the same way school board meetings are run.

Another element of community leadership is your internal board operations. Your school board meetings are an excellent opportunity for the public to see how boards impact student achievement though

- The meeting agenda
- Goal setting and data examination
- Identifying legislative opportunities
- Showcasing partnerships with businesses, higher education, and others

Your board operating rules should be clearly stated and formally adopted, including a reference to an external set of guidelines, such as the most recent edition of Robert’s Rules of Order. If these rules becomes cumbersome, they should be changed. To be most effective, the rules must make sense to those who must abide by them.

Successful board meetings reflect the efforts of many people working together. Effective meetings require planning before the agenda goes out and cooperation, consideration, and communication during the meeting.

Board members should not be expected to agree on every agenda item. In fact, disagreement and discussion of varying points of view helps the board make better decisions. However, board members must respect each other and differing opinions and remember that meetings are for making decisions that profoundly affect the lives of children.

Messages that Matter

Do you use your clout? As a board member, you have the first-hand knowledge of an insider, while maintaining your position as an average citizen. You have an important message to deliver, and you have credibility with other elected officials. This provides you with an opportunity to be more assertive in identifying, supporting, and testifying on legislative issues.

Although a communications program isn't created spontaneously, communication often is. The simplest gestures of board members, the appearance on your campuses, your conduct at board meetings, your availability to constituents, and board involvement in civic and school activities -- all of these are subtle forms of communication. If any are left to chance, poor communication can result. Each district needs a planned, systematic communications program to win the understanding and support from the community. It is necessary to guard against consuming meetings with administrative details and failing to leave time and energy for the important governance issues: policy making, planning, and promotion. An excellent way for the board to keep its priorities clear is through a carefully considered relevant meeting agenda that is designed to bring the board's attention to governance issues.

In presenting your board's position on legislative matters, consider these central messages:

1. Schools have changed. Many things that legislators say people want are already happening.
2. The accountability process is working. Parents are involved. Goals are being set and met. Progress is being assessed.
3. Inadequate funding leads to inadequate facilities and programs. While the successes need to be shown, so do the problems: the things we want to change.
4. Board members strongly support local control and know they represent the electorate.
5. Anywhere from 80 percent to 85 percent of a district's budget is tied to salaries and benefits.

There are essentially three dimensions where school boards can assert their influence to impact student outcomes.

Externally, boards can engage the community and pursue a purposeful legislative advocacy agenda. Internally, boards can set parameters for how they operate so time and resources are used efficiently and effectively. The first two seek commendable success in the world. The last, self-governance, is not glamorous and often unseen. But, in-house rules are the nuts and bolts necessary for board members to instill public trust and take care of the district's business. Taken together, they demonstrate leadership in three dimensions. As you work to engage the community, pursue an assertive, purposeful legislative advocacy agenda, and ensure that you keep your own internal house in order, do you display these characteristics?

Next Steps:

- Take a look at the “Steps to Building Collaborative Relationships” tips. How does your board go about inviting others to the table while making sure the focus remains on student outcomes?
- Review the chart on the roles of the board and the superintendent Community Leadership. You may want to discuss how well members of the leadership team understand and observe their appropriate leadership roles.

Steps to Building Collaborative Relationships

Collaboration has no formula or ready prescription, but the following practical steps can strengthen the process:

Support a Communications infrastructure. Encourage the board to support a communications plan, identify key participants in your communications strategy and provide professional development to assist those people in gaining the necessary skills.

Tell your story. Your school district has things the community wants and needs to hear. Others will be quick to share their version of what is happening. It is up to you to make sure your story is told the way you want the public to hear it. Spend time articulating our story and make sure all concerned (board, administrators and staff) know and can repeat specific talking points.

Practice two-way communication. This is the basis for working together to identify and address issues. As leaders, you have the essential responsibility of informing parents and other community members about issues and events in the public schools. You must hear what the parents and community think, especially when they disagree with you.

Engaging your community starts with keeping them well informed and keenly aware that their reactions and feedback are welcome. Look at your district's communications, including your website, press releases, newsletters, and other publications. Do they communicate clear, straight stories about your district's accomplishments and challenges? Are they simply written? Do they use specific examples to make their point? Do they invite community reaction and input?

Restructure your board meeting. Community engagement is very difficult when a board meeting agenda appears to be an impenetrable monolith of official actions and tightly timed discussions about predetermined topics. A "Community Comments" slot with limits on how much time each speaker is allocated may be an effective meetings management strategy, but not an engaging way to develop partners.

Driven by the twin necessities of involving the community and carrying out business in an orderly fashion, some boards divide work into two meetings. One is a work session involving a wide-ranging discussion of major issues, with an explicit invitation for community members to participate. No official action is taken. The second is the typical business meeting, during which formal action is taken in a more compact format. The business meeting can be considerably shorter because it focuses on action discussed and debated in the work session, during which you had extensive dialogue with staff and community.

Model collaboration for others. Collaborative relationships are based on trust and respect. Boards must model the relationships they seek to build with others. How you run meetings sends clear signals about how you value collaboration. A board that behaves contentiously and provincially is not likely to build credibility among community leaders or enlist them as partners in their schools' success.

Team-building activities conducted by skilled trainers build trust and develop effective ways of communicating together. Retreats and other reflective sessions can help boards accomplish this. An orientation program for new board members, usually available from your state association, is

essential for helping new members see themselves as joining an effective team with a shared vision, not as entering a political poker game with the goal of winning as much as they can.

Invite others to the table. Many citizens feel alienated because they have no children in school, they have heard negative things, or they did not have positive experiences themselves. Many of these individuals are community leaders and influence the others' opinions. Boards must find ways to engage disaffected individuals in ongoing discussions, enlist their help in crafting a vision for the future, and seek their assistance in solving complex challenges.

Focus on issues that unite, not divide. Building collaborative relationships requires finding common ground and creating opportunities to work together to accomplish mutually beneficial goals. Too often we spend our time focusing on areas of disagreement, giving up valuable opportunities for collaboration and problem solving.

Consider a social media policy. Social media has changed the way the community talks *about* the schools – you need to include it in your strategy to use it for the community to talk *to* the schools. Also, social media often brings with it instant gratification. In some cases the district needs to be thoughtful (and careful) in reacting to information out in the media.

Finding common ground often requires reframing an issue. For example, public accountability demands challenge boards to focus as never before on student achievement. A significant body of research confirms what most of us believe intuitively: Teacher quality is key to increased student achievement. Skilled teachers consistently lead students to higher levels. Poor teachers have a negative impact that can last for several years.

What would happen if boards and teachers worked collaboratively to develop plans for improving achievement? Instead of seeing teachers as the problem, boards would empower classroom professionals to be part of the solution. Instead of fixing blame, the board would be fixing the problem. Likewise, teachers would not see boards as an obstacle, but as a key partner.

Collaborative relationships require time and attention to cultivate and maintain. You can lead from a position of extraordinary strength by inviting others to the table, investing in the process of reflection and skill building, and modeling what is expected of others.

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Community Leadership

The School Board

- Fosters collaborative relationships as a board philosophy in: strategic planning, community vision, and instructional improvements.
- Approves and periodically reviews a district plan to build collaborative relationships with key stakeholders at all levels based on gaining support for student achievement as the district's top priority.
- Models collaboration and trust.
- Advocates district positions on educational issues with legislators and other state and local political leaders and keeps abreast of other state and national issues.
- Advocates student achievement as a top community priority.
- Ensures a climate of open communications at board meetings and throughout the district.
- Provides funding and resources for collaborative efforts.

The Superintendent

- Follows a collaborative approach in working with the board.
- Encourages the board and staff to involve key stakeholders in appropriate decision making both at the district and at the school level.
- Helps the board identify Key Communicators within the district and recommend appropriate professional development to help them improve their skills.
- Recommends to the board a plan to build these collaborative relationships, leads a periodic review of progress and implements adopted strategies for improved relationships.
- Keeps the board and others informed about the district's progress and solicits appropriate input for areas of concern.
- Works with the board to determine a process for a periodic review of the leadership team's relationship and vision.
- Implements changes recommended through the periodic review.
- Assists the board in its advocacy efforts with public officials by arranging meetings, providing needed data and information, and scheduling other activities as needed.
- Provides data and relevant materials to assist the board in its advocacy role.
- Teams with board members to speak to groups within the community.
- Ensures a climate of open communications, both internally and externally.
- Recommends additional policies or policy revisions.
- Presents budget recommendations needed to support collaborative efforts and initiatives.

Chapter 5: Board and Superintendent Relationships

To develop a productive partnership, the board and superintendent must draw on, and respect, the backgrounds and abilities of everyone involved.

Objective: To understand how the board-superintendent leadership roles are interconnected as well as the process for decision making and evaluation.

“United we stand, divided we fall.” — When it comes to the relationship between the school board and the superintendent, no more fitting words apply.

The most important relationship a school board must establish is with its superintendent. A board cannot be effective unless the superintendent is fulfilling his/her responsibilities. Conversely, the superintendent functions best when the board develops the district’s vision and establishes clear expectations and direction.

In public schools, for the most part, citizens elect school boards, which in turn hire superintendents as chief executive officers. Further, most states have laws that say citizens who sit on school boards are responsible for adopting policies; the professionals they hire as superintendents are supposed to administer the district, serve as the preeminent education advisors to the board, and translate board policy into action.

In practice, however, the relationship between board and superintendent differs from district to district; it differs on various issues within a district; and it may diverge at different phases of a particular relationship. The relationship also may differ according to local customs, personalities, state law, or local policy.

Both the board and superintendent have essential leadership roles. The school board governs the district, which is administered by the superintendent. The conventional way of expressing this distinction is to say that boards make policy and superintendents administer policy. What’s important in a district is not that people use these descriptions, but that an understanding develops between the board and superintendent about their respective roles.

The district suffers when either attempts to exercise the responsibilities of the other. The board abandons its leadership role when it involves itself in administration. Becoming involved in management activities distracts the board from its essential leadership functions or governance responsibilities — planning (vision), policymaking, and promotion (community leadership).

School districts work best through the coordinated efforts of boards and superintendents. The jobs of the board and superintendent are interactive, perhaps overlapping; their goals are, or should be, the same.

The Role of the Board and Superintendent

Developing a productive partnership requires the board and superintendent to draw on, and respect, the backgrounds and abilities of everyone involved. A board can adopt or revise policies that specify what it can expect from the superintendent and vice versa. The superintendent generally brings professional training and experience to the job. Board members bring an understanding of the public's view of the educational process, as well as personal knowledge and experience.

When defining roles in writing, a board can be as specific or as general as it sees fit. Specific policies allow less room for misunderstanding, but even specific policies should leave room for administrative flexibility. The board also should permit the superintendent to take prudent risks — and allow opportunities for corrective action when mistakes are made — without excessive interference, criticism, or supervision.

To better understand the board-superintendent work relationship, some districts develop a list of situations that require decisions in areas such as personnel, finance, curriculum, community relations, and internal school operations. The list, drawn from actual circumstances, divides the authority the board and the superintendent have to make decisions into four levels:

- Level 1. The superintendent has complete authority to decide and act within the limits of law, board policy, propriety, and common sense.
- Level 2. The superintendent has complete authority to act but must inform the board about each decision or action.
- Level 3. The superintendent must obtain prior approval from the school board before taking action.
- Level 4. The school board makes the final decision but may permit or require a recommendation from the superintendent.

The superintendent and each board member submit a list of situations, which are compiled and reviewed. In one variation of the process, the board and superintendent follow these steps to reach a final decision:

- Each board member and the superintendent reviews the master list of situations, adding items if necessary.
- Next, board members and the superintendent go through the list individually, indicating their opinion on the appropriate level of authority for each potential situation.
- Results are compiled, and a composite is made showing the various levels suggested for each situation.

- Finally, the board and superintendent discuss the composite, attempt to reach consensus when possible, and indicate where compromise might be needed.

This type of analysis often will reveal philosophical differences among board members and between the board and superintendent regarding the district's operations. The final outcome may be consensus on some items, but in other situations, the board must decide who should have authority for various aspects of school operations.

As the district's leadership team, the board and superintendent must work together to model a shared commitment to higher standards, an ability to discuss difficult topics professionally, and the belief that continuous improvement is necessary for all students to succeed. This leadership team must insist on a culture of high expectations for all children that starts in every classroom and moves up through the system to the boardroom.

To do this, the board and superintendent must create a system-wide approach to improving student achievement, recognizing the board's appropriate role as the community's representative and the superintendent's role as the professional educator.

The relationships you foster with fellow board members, particularly those with whom you disagree, will impact your effectiveness. It is very important to do two things: earn respect and show respect. Fortunately, both can be accomplished by adhering to many of the same basic principles:

- **Be prepared.** Increase your knowledge and understanding of substantive and procedural issues and topics that are relevant to your job. In particular, improve your awareness and understanding of relevant local, state, and national laws, trends, and developments in education, as well as parliamentary, budgetary, and policy-related procedures and processes. Participating in

Basic to functioning as a team is a plan for roles and procedures. The following activities are critical in developing a plan for roles and procedures.

1. Outline board and superintendent roles and how they complement one another. The board establishes policies and the superintendent implements them and is responsible for the operation of the school district. Together they work to engage the community in determining the future direction of the district and have the joint task of establishing district-wide goals and objectives.
2. Emphasize that the board functions as a unit, not as a collection of individuals with individual agendas. The main objective of both school board and superintendent is to educate the district's students. To achieve this objective, they should view themselves as members of a team—not as adversaries on opposing teams.
3. Specify how decisions will be made—by consensus or by majority vote. Consensus-driven decision making can help build relationships and break down barriers to improving student achievement.
4. Recognize the superintendent as the chief executive officer of the school district.
5. Build for the future—seek out high-quality future board and superintendent candidates. Board candidates can be cultivated through outreach efforts to represent the needs of the community and to engage the public in the strategic direction of its schools. Future superintendents can be developed from within the district through a structured professional development program.

workshops and seminars and read various books, magazines, and other materials on specific subjects. Always do your homework before board meetings and devote sufficient time, thought, and study to proposed actions.

- **Be professional.** Do not shirk your professional responsibilities as a board member. Make every attempt to attend all board meetings and events. Although you may be busy, give each issue the attention it deserves, and try not to focus on a limited agenda, no matter how compelling or important it is to you personally. Put everything of importance in writing: the board's mission statement, goals, bylaws, code of conduct, and administrative and operational procedures. Treat these written documents as benchmarks against which you evaluate how you spend your time and resources and how you assess your progress. Build bridges among your board colleagues and between the board and other community groups. Your colleagues will be more likely to consider your opinion, or be persuaded by your arguments, if they admire your attitude, tone, and behavior.

- **Be fair and objective.** Students depend on you to do the right thing, so keep an open mind. Accept new concepts and evaluate them fairly, really listen to what people have to say, and be willing to consider alternative solutions to problems. Know the difference between personal influence and factual persuasion. Listen to constructive criticism. At all times, support and protect the civil and human rights of everyone in the school community. Maintain a sense of perspective and a sense of humor.

- **Be honest and open.** Do not use your office for personal or partisan gain or for the benefit of your family, friends, or special interest group. Reveal all business or social relationships you have with organizations or individuals with whom the district does business. In addition, do not make promises to citizens that you lack the authority to make or take private action that will compromise the district, board, or administration. Avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest. If you disagree with particular decisions or regulations, do not take actions in secret; instead, try to bring about change through legally established procedures. Handle public matters in a public forum and private matters in closed sessions. Respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged, and do not reveal it to the public or the press.

- **Be a team player.** As individual board members, you lack both power and authority. As a member of the board team, however, you can affect change and bring about important improvements. Again, teamwork is key. Even when you vote with the minority on a particular issue, support the majority and share responsibility for the decision. Recognize that a divided board is usually weaker and less effective. Finally, unless it is absolutely necessary, do not criticize or air dirty laundry in public. Your district and students stand to lose when you undermine the people you work for within the district or community.

Board Training/Retreats

Professional development/training can greatly strengthen the board and superintendent team. It can help turn around a situation in which there is conflict or keep a well-functioning team on track. Focus on professional development that emphasizes joint board and superintendent training and teamwork. Often development programs offer teamwork models. No model can meet every district's needs, so do not hesitate to borrow from various models to develop measures that best suit your board and

superintendent. Your state school boards association can offer or suggest quality board development activities.

Board-superintendent retreats offer opportunities for people to get to know each other and better understand the diversity of skills, personalities, and interests among board members. Retreats provide a more relaxed environment in which to review district goals, objectives, policies, and procedures. They also are an effective way to establish basic directions and decision-making roles for the board and superintendent.

Research has shown that formal training for board members leads to effective governance. Starting with orientation for new board members, and continuing with formal and informal learning activities that involve both the board and superintendent, you can build shared knowledge, values, and commitments to improving your schools.

Board/Superintendent Communication

Once the roles and responsibilities of the board and the superintendent are defined, maintaining that connection requires open, direct, and frequent two-way communication. Together both parties must decide how the superintendent will communicate with the board and the vice versa.

Communication comes in many forms, but strategies fall into three broad categories: written or electronic messages, telephone conversations, and personal contact. Here are some of the most effective ways to utilize each medium:

Written or electronic messages. To keep board members informed about operational matters, the superintendent can send regular memos, bulletins, or emails that outline the major events and activities of the week. Email is particularly well suited to sharing consistent and timely information when something small but manageable goes wrong – such as a fire at school. Periodic bulletins, on the other hand, can call the board’s attention to major events and issues for information or for future action.

Another means is for the superintendent to distribute meaningful materials. For example:

- Magazine and newspaper articles relevant to the district.
- Publications and reports from state and national education organizations.
- Copies of reports to the administrative staff.
- Certain reports to state agencies.
- Reports developed at the request of outside organizations, such as the League of Women Voters or the Chamber of Commerce.
- School newspapers, newsletters, and department bulletins.

Telephone. When emergencies occur, the telephone is the best tool for instant communication. Most board veterans and superintendents caution against taking up the superintendent’s time with

excessively frequent telephone calls. Phone calls also have limitations. You can't see the person at the other end of the line to observe nonverbal signals, which account for almost half of the understanding achieved in face-to-face communication.

Like the phone itself, answering machines and voice mail are both convenient and frustrating. They are convenient as a way to leave a brief message, but frustrating because of uncertainty that the message is fully clear or has been received.

Personal contact. Conversations between individual board members and the superintendent can be helpful, but many boards adopt a policy that outlines the circumstances and methods for that kind of communication. The idea is to reduce any suspicion of favoritism by the superintendent, or undue influence or pressure by the individual member. When it comes to district-wide concerns, the superintendent should not say anything to an individual board member that cannot be said to the board as a whole.

Superintendent's Performance Evaluation

As community trustees, the board has an obligation to evaluate the individual to whom it has entrusted its most important assets — its children and its money. In addition, as an employer, the board has an obligation to let its chief executive officer know what is expected, to give feedback about performance, and to offer opportunities for continuous improvement.

Evaluating the superintendent really begins with the selection process. If the board has developed sound selection criteria—that is, the factors and characteristics sought in a superintendent—subsequent performance can be evaluated against those criteria. In many states, the law requires that boards develop and follow procedures for the superintendent's formal evaluation. Even in the absence of law, however, most school boards agree on the importance of a sound superintendent performance evaluation, both for the purposes of accountability and because such a system can be mutually beneficial for themselves and their chief executive officer.

For the board to fulfill its accountability responsibilities, it is imperative that expectations for the district and superintendent are clearly established. These expectations should be measurable, not general, so the superintendent and board can accurately assess whether progress is being made. Evaluation also provides both sides with a forum for airing issues, problems, needs, concerns, frustrations, or anxieties. It promotes performance by clarifying responsibilities in addition to setting standards and goals. The focus is on identifying aspects of day-to-day performance that should be rewarded and those that should be improved.

A high-quality superintendent evaluation process helps develop good board/superintendent relationships, provides clarity of roles, creates common understanding of the leadership being provided, and provides a mechanism for public accountability.

The evaluation process involves the four core board governing roles:

- Vision: Goal setting.
- Structure: Developing a clear written evaluation plan and timeline.
- Accountability: Measuring the superintendent's performance.
- Advocacy: Communication of goals and progress among the board, superintendent, and

The superintendent performance evaluation should be an extension of your district's overall planning process. The primary focus should be to assist the superintendent in achieving maximum effectiveness in working with the board and managing the school district. Every comment made, every rating, and every action taken should be designed to achieve that purpose.

After the formal evaluation process is complete, the board may want to review the superintendent's job description and employment contract to determine whether both are current and relevant. If appropriate, the board may act on the superintendent's compensation or contract. At this point, the board and superintendent focus on the future, establishing goals, expectations, and measures for the following year.

Performance evaluations are most effective when they are designed and used for communicating future expectations, not simply for reviewing what occurred in the past. As many superintendents know, if you don't know what the board expects, it is difficult, if not impossible, to meet those expectations. On the other hand, if the board fails to monitor progress towards its goals, it will not know when they have been successfully completed.

A board and superintendent that have taken the time to develop a mutually agreed upon process for evaluation will have taken great strides towards strengthening the district's leadership team and moving the district forward to even higher levels of achievement and success.

Establishing Norms and Bylaws to Ensure Effective Governance

Ethics and effectiveness are different concepts that go hand in hand. If your actions are guided by a sound, ethical code of conduct, chances are good that you will be an effective board member who produces results. Ideally, the board's code of ethics shapes attitudes and guides behavior as you relate to students, parents, school and staff, the superintendent, other community members, and board colleagues.

Given its influence, it is extremely important for board members to articulate, internalize, and document specific, mutually agreed-upon ethical principles. You should review this code of ethics or code of conduct, both individually and as a board, frequently and consistently to ensure that it is not forgotten in the rush of daily duties and deadlines. It should also be among the first items you place in the hands of new board members.

A code of conduct starts with the basic rules of good board service: Do your homework, don't surprise other board members in public, and don't resort to personal attacks. The code should address such questions as how information will come to board members. It should also specify how the board will communicate with the public. You also might want to include a discussion about the role of the board president and the responsibility of other members to abide by the president's rulings.

Once the code is in place, everyone needs to take responsibility for living by it. Some boards try to review their contract every three months. What if an individual board member refuses to play by the rules? Appealing to that member's better nature may be the best course. Remember, however, that rancor at the top of the school system will eventually lead to rancor in the classroom—and the children will be the ones who suffer.

No code, of course, is complete without such traditional ethics as honesty, trust, fairness, and integrity. Not using the office for personal or partisan gain, or for the benefit of family, friends, church, or special-interest groups also should be a part of the code. Recognizing the limits of your authority as individual board members also is vital. Making promises to citizens without the proper authority is unethical.

Board self-evaluation

Employees are evaluated in your school district for various reasons. You want to make sure your tax dollars are used wisely and well. You want to know your teachers are accountable for what they do in the classroom. You want administrators to be accountable for their decisions and management ability. You want the superintendent to be accountable for administering the district.

The “why” of board evaluation also is quite simple: The process helps you improve your service.

How are you and your board doing as school leaders? Many boards try to answer this question by assessing public opinion. If the community and staff are not complaining, many believe they are doing all right. It’s common to hear an elected board member say, “I get evaluated at the polls.” Some appointed board members view reappointment as an affirmation that they are doing a good job.

The public can provide informal evaluation of a board, but it cannot provide what a board really needs to be effective. Community members rarely fully understand the board’s roles and responsibilities and measures performance in light of them. Instead, board members need to engage in regular self-evaluations to make sure they are exercising the most effective leadership possible, but many do not have a process for doing so.

For several reasons, every school board should participate in some kind of self-evaluation at least annually. You can and should set an example for your staff, which is being evaluated now more than ever. Also, a good evaluation program uncovers problems if they exist, identifies areas where improvement is needed, and keeps the board mindful of its own operations and procedures.

The critical factor in board self-evaluation is not the instrument or process used but the need to identify the specific criteria that spells success for your board and district. The board must state well in advance the goals and mileposts that it wants to achieve; otherwise you have no basis for assessment. Evaluation takes time, understanding, and commitment. Board members must trust each other to work in good faith, and with sensitivity and respect.

If your evaluation effort is based on these qualities, and if board members focus on improvement rather than on criticizing or finger pointing, the board can make self-evaluation one of its most productive and rewarding activities.

Great Expectations

On both sides, a good working relationship between the board and superintendent is partly a matter of agreement on expectations. A superintendent is expected to be an excellent educational leader, politically sophisticated, and aware of and active in legislative developments. As the chief executive

officer, he/she needs to have extensive knowledge of federal and state laws, be an exemplary educator, and to personify effective communication.

A school board is asked to be responsive to constituencies in its governance role and sensitive to the special needs of all learners in the district. At the same time, board members must be active advocates with local, state, and federal government bodies and vigorous ambassadors in explaining the role of public education and its programs to all citizens.

There's no question that a school board and its superintendent form a strong leadership team. However, there is a distinct division of authority and responsibility. To develop an effective partnership, the school board and the superintendent must draw on and respect the backgrounds and abilities of everyone involved.

Next steps:

- Examine the suggestions made regarding "Planning For Superintendent Evaluation." Discuss with your board how you might use this as a tool to help determine the evaluation method your board selects to meet its objectives and needs.
- Consider referring to the "Checklist for Evaluation" to help ensure that your superintendent evaluation process is mutually agreed upon and understood.
- Check with your state school board association for assistance in identifying a board self-evaluation tool that can help your board align your self evaluation process to your district vision and goals.

Planning for Superintendent Evaluation

In gearing up for the superintendent's evaluation, you are likely to run into a set of easy questions with difficult answers. Your board must ask itself:

- What are we legally required to do?
- What is our responsibility to the community to account for the performance of the superintendent?
- What purpose will the evaluation serve?
- How can we avoid letting this becoming a negative process?
- What role will each member and the superintendent have in developing and carrying through the evaluation process?
- What resources do we have for developing a valid evaluation tool? How will we use the results of the evaluation? For performance appraisal? As a guidance tool? For goal assessment? To indicate needed changes?
- What do we expect the superintendent to accomplish?
- Have our goals, policies, direction, and budget allocations made this possible?
- Does our superintendent's job description cover our expectations?
- What has the superintendent been doing that's right?
- In what areas does the superintendent need to improve?

The answers to these questions are important because they will have a bearing on which evaluation method your board selects to meet its objectives and needs.

Checklist for Superintendent Evaluation

Use this checklist to ensure that your board covers all the bases when evaluating its superintendent.

- The standards for judging the superintendent's performance are understood by both the superintendent and the members of the board.
- The board has agreed with the superintendent on a time and place for the evaluation.
- The board has specified that no other matters of business will be on the agenda for this meeting.
- The board is assured that all of its members will attend.
- All members understand that their individual assessments of the superintendent will be compiled into a final composite evaluation that will be discussed between the superintendent and the whole board.
- The board has established criteria that will evaluate both strengths and weaknesses.
- The board and the superintendent have agreed on a method of evaluation, and the evaluation will become a regularly scheduled event, to occur at least once each year.
- Both the board and the superintendent will participate. The board will assess the superintendent according to the agreed-upon criteria; the superintendent will use the same criteria as a basis for self-evaluation.
- It is understood that when evaluation forms are used, the board still may wish to address other matters (to which the superintendent will have a fair opportunity to respond).
- The final evaluation will be in writing; and adequate, objective documentation for all conclusions will be provided.
- It is understood between the parties that, one or more criteria might be deleted from the process because extenuating circumstances may have prevented the superintendent from performing the function.

Since the founding of our nation, locally elected or appointed school boards have accomplished a key goal of their communities: providing high-quality education to our citizens. Despite the strong criticisms from many, even today, most of our boards continue this critical tradition.

A school board's vision establishes goals for the district. Accountability – the education “hot topic” of the 21st century – means measuring and judging how well the district is putting vision into practice. Policy is the tool board members use to implement the vision. Community leadership is when school board members act as ambassadors and advocates for district interests. Last, but certainly not least, is cultivating an open, honest relationship between the board and superintendent.

The Key Work identifies the core skills that effective boards need to ensure that all students achieve at high levels. With these skills, boards can guide their vision to fruition by exploring, questioning, assessing, and working with others to improve outcomes for today's students as well as America's next generation.

We are heading into a new era. With new initiatives, increased focus and stronger accountability, public education is at a crossroads. It is the responsibility of boards to live up to these new expectations, while defending their authority and unique status between themselves and their communities. We believe that boards are in the best seats to determine what the best methods are for ensuring our young citizens achieve at the highest levels. Boards can use their experience, knowledge of their communities, legal authority and their roles as conveners of the community to best understand and make the best use of reformers' solutions to the challenges in public education.

And, they can do this as they balance those solutions against the best from our traditional classrooms. In collaboration with local stakeholders, their state associations and NSBA, boards must be the education decision makers for their communities.



Eight traits of effective school boards

What makes an effective school board – one that positively impacts student achievement? From a research perspective, it's a complex question. It 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 research that exists is clear: boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-achieving districts. So what do these boards do? Here are eight characteristics:

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision. Effective boards make sure these goals remain the district's top priorities and that nothing else detracts from them. In contrast, low-achieving boards "were only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives" (Lighthouse I). "There was little evidence of a pervasive focus on school renewal at any level when it was not present at the board level," researchers said. (Lighthouse I)

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 high-achieving districts, 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. In low-achieving districts, board members frequently referred to external pressures as the main reasons for lack of student success. (Lighthouse I)

3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement. In interviews with hundreds of board members and staff across districts, researchers Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman found that high-performing boards focused on establishing a vision supported by policies that targeted student achievement. Poor governance was characterized by factors such as micro-management by the 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. In high-achieving districts, school board members could provide specific examples of how they connected and listened to the community, and school board members received information from many different sources, including the superintendent, curriculum director, principals and teachers. Findings and research were shared among all board members. (Lighthouse I; Waters and Marzano) By comparison, school boards in low-achieving districts were likely to cite communication and outreach barriers. Staff members from low-achieving districts often said they didn't know the board members at all.

5. Effective school boards are data savvy: they embrace and monitor data, even when the information

is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. The Lighthouse I study showed that board members in high-achieving districts identified specific student needs through data, and justified decisions based on that data. Board members regularly sought such data and were not shy about discussing it, even if it was negative. 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 these districts, board members frequently discussed their decisions through anecdotes and personal experiences rather than by citing data. They left it to the superintendent to interpret the data and recommend solutions.

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

According to researchers LaRocque and Coleman, 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.” 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.

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

In successful districts, boards defined an initial vision for the district and sought a superintendent who matched this vision. In contrast, in stagnant districts, boards were slow to define a vision and often recruited a superintendent with his or her own ideas and platform, leading the board and superintendent to not be in alignment. (MDRC/Council of Great City Schools)

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.

High-achieving districts had formal, deliberate training for new board members. They also often gathered to discuss specific topics. Low-achieving districts had board members who said they did not learn together except when the superintendent or other staff members made presentations of data. (Lighthouse I; LFA; LaRocque and Coleman)

Though the research on school board effectiveness is in the beginning stages, the studies included in this report make it clear that school boards in high-achieving districts have attitudes, knowledge and approaches that separate them from their counterparts in lower-achieving districts. 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 school districts nationwide.

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This summary is based on a report written for the Center for Public Education 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.

References and Resources

- Center for Public Education website: www.centerforpubliceducation.org A joint initiative of the National School Boards Association and National School Boards Foundation, the Center for Public Education is a national resource for accurate, timely, and credible information about public education and its importance to the well-being of our nation.
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- Standards: Links to official state standards and voluntary national standards can be found at www.educationworld.com/standards.
- The Council of Chief State School Officers (www.ccsso.org) compiles information on state content standards
- Achieve, Inc. (www.achieve.org) gathers extensive information on state standards and benchmarks

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About NSBA

The Leading Advocate for Public Education

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization that represents state associations of school boards and their more than 90,000 school board members across the United States. These local officials govern more than 13,600 local school districts serving the nation's 50 million public school students. Working with and through member state associations, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board leadership.

NSBA advocates for local school boards as the ultimate expression of grassroots democracy. In response to growing challenges facing public education and local school governance, NSBA is engaging in a more assertive approach to advocacy in the legislative, legal, and public arenas. The association's ambitious and aggressive advocacy agenda aims to shape the debate about public education and counter the efforts of for-profit critics who endanger this vital institution.

NSBA achieves its mission by representing the school board perspective in working with federal government agencies and national organizations that impact education, and providing relevant information and services to state associations of school boards throughout the nation. The association views education as a civil right necessary to the dignity and freedom of the American people, and believes that all children should have equal access to a public school education. Our nation's school boards play a pivotal role in advancing student achievement – envisioning the future of education in local communities; establishing a structure and environment that allows all students to reach their maximum potential; providing accountability to the community on student outcomes; and serving as the key advocate for school-age children and public schools.

NSBA policy is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly of local school board members who represent their state associations of school boards. The 25-member Board of Directors translates this policy into action. Programs and services are administered by the NSBA Executive Director and a nearly 80-person staff. The NSBA headquarters is located in Alexandria, Virginia, part of the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area.

Founded in 1940, 2015 marks the 75th year of operation of NSBA. Join us in our important work to stand up for public schools and advocate on behalf of America's public schoolchildren.



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