



BOARD-SUPERINTENDENT TEAM

MEMBER HANDBOOK

*What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child,
that must the community want for all of its children.*

Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.

- John Dewey

Preamble

The Tonasket School District Board of Directors understands that access to a quality public education is not just a constitutional requirement but also a moral imperative. Accordingly, our students are entitled to a rigorous, relevant, and engaging educational experience that prepares them to be lifelong learners.

We believe we have a moral imperative to ensure that each child learns.

We believe diversity leads to a strong and resilient community.

We believe families play a vital role in education.

We believe public education encompasses the entire community and that community participation is crucial to enhance student learning.

We believe focused professional development is imperative to assure learning.

We believe students deserve a nurturing environment that is physically, emotionally and intellectually safe.

We believe we must manage our fiscal resources responsibly and efficiently to effect student learning so as to honor the community's contributions.

We believe data driven decisions lead to improved student learning.

We believe learning goes beyond curriculum and it is learning that prepares students to take their place in the world.

Introduction

This handbook is a summary of the governing approach adopted by the Tonasket School Board. Its purpose is to provide a common understanding on how the Board carries out its responsibilities.

The Board recognizes that a quality public education is “the paramount duty” of the state, as boldly declared in the Washington State Constitution. As an agent of the state, our Board fully accepts its obligation to fulfill this state responsibility at the local level for the students of our district.

In order to provide the necessary and appropriate leadership for the Tonasket School District, the Board of Directors, collectively and individually, commits to governing professionally. Professionalism requires that we hold a shared understanding of and commitment to the values, principles, policies, practices, and procedures adopted by the Board, a focus on continuous learning and improvement in our governing skills, and a willingness to serve as a model of governance for students, staff, the Tonasket community, and our colleagues on other school boards.

Successful organizations are the result of effective and dynamic leadership. Effective leaders agree on basic ways of working together. Operating principles define the beliefs, values, and methods of working together. This handbook outlines a philosophy of cooperative behavior agreed upon by the Board of Directors and the Superintendent of the Tonasket School District. Because this handbook is written in abbreviated form, the language in state law, regulation, contractual obligations, or actual board policy supersedes any questions or possible conflicting interpretations that may arise from the language found herein.

Acknowledgment

The idea for this handbook came from the Board of Education of Berlin, CT, in a presentation *Professional Governance Boards = Student Success* at the 2013 NSBA annual conference, and was developed for local use by University Place School Director Rick Maloney and presented at the 2014 WSSDA annual conference. Their contributions to the spirit of good governance are gratefully acknowledged.

Key Work of School Boards (see Appendix A for a full version)

In addition to its Mission, Vision, Goals, and Beliefs, as well as responsibilities defined by law, the Board subscribes to the *Key Work of School Boards*. This framework for planning and action, developed by the National School Board Association, is based on the system's concept that no action or progress is accomplished in isolation. The eight essential areas for Board focus and action are as follows:

1. Vision – establishing a clear vision of student achievement as a top priority of the Board, staff and community.
2. Standards – setting clear standards for student performance.
3. Assessment – establishing regular and valid assessments to measure district and student progress.
4. Accountability – establishing a process that holds the school system accountable for student success.
5. Alignment – aligning of all district resources to focus on student performance.
6. Climate – creating a positive climate throughout the school district to promote student success.
7. Collaborative Relationships – building collaborative relationships with the community to promote and develop a consensus and understanding of the priority of student achievement.
8. Continuous Improvement – committing all individuals within the school district to the idea of continuous improvement in the pursuit of student achievement and success.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Board and Superintendent recognize that an effective collaboration relies on clear understanding of the differing and complementary roles and responsibilities of each.

Roles –The Board is charged with governance, not management (IASB):

The role of the board is to:	The role of the superintendent is to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Govern the school district• Answer the questions: What? Why? How much?• Decide by voting in open meeting• Identify intended result• Monitor results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manage the district• Answer the questions: How? When? Where? By whom?• Recommend and implement• Lead the staff to improved district performance and compliance with board policy
Board Work = ENDS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Values and Beliefs• Mission• Vision• Goals (ends statements)	Superintendent Work = MEANS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SMART goals• Objectives• Action Plans• Regulations• Procedures

Responsibilities: Superintendent and Board responsibilities differ significantly

The Board's responsibilities include:	The Superintendent's responsibilities include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the district's direction and articulate that direction in mission, visions, and goal statements (ends), which becomes the cornerstone of written policy. • Employ a superintendent, provide a well-crafted superintendent job description and delegate authority. • Monitor progress towards ends, and compliance with written policy, using data as the means for assessment. • Evaluate the means the superintendent uses to effect the board's intended ends. • Take responsibility for itself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the board in doing its work by assisting the board in building its own capacity as a governing board through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professional development ▪ Informing the board of governmental changes ▪ Providing excellent information and data, and training in how to interpret data, so the board is able to make informed decisions • Implement the district's strategic initiatives and provide monitoring reports throughout the year. • Administer and manage the district efficiently and effectively using excellent leadership and management skills used in a moral and ethical manner. • Represent the district within the community, carrying the district's message, and advocating on its behalf.

I. The Board of Directors

- a. **Purpose.** The Tonasket Board of Directors is committed to governing with excellence, in order to assure on behalf of the community that Tonasket Schools cultivate generations of leaders through passion, integrity, respect, and powerful teamwork, no matter what.
- b. **Governance Approach.** The Tonasket Board of Directors governs through policy that guides the Board in its own work, policy that guides the Superintendent in conducting district business, ongoing monitoring of district and Board performance, and a commitment to continuous improvement through individual and board professional development.
Reference: RCW 28A.150.230, RCW 28A.315.035, BP 1630

The most effective boards understand that their role is one of governance. The Illinois School Board Association's (ISBA) document *The Foundational Principles of Effective Governance* lists six key principles: (See Appendix B for additional detail.)

1. *The Board Clarifies The District Purpose:* As its primary purpose, the board continually defines, articulates, and re-defines district ends.
2. *The Board Connects With The Community:* Through meaningful community engagement, the board hears and understands the community's educational aspirations and desires for its children, informs the community of the district's performance, and advocates for the needs of children.
3. *The Board Employs And Evaluates The Superintendent:* The employment relationship consists of mutual respect and a clear understanding of respective roles, responsibilities and expectations. This relationship should be grounded in a thoughtfully crafted employment contract and job description; procedures for communications and ongoing assessment; and reliance on written policy.
4. *The Board Delegates Authority:* The board delegates authority through written policies that designate district ends and define operating parameters. Ultimately the board is responsible

- for everything, yet must recognize that everything depends upon a capable and competent staff. “Delegates authority” means empowering the superintendent and staff to single-mindedly and without hesitation pursue board ends; high levels of superintendent/staff accountability requires high levels of delegation, which can be difficult for directors accustomed to direct action. But if boards involve themselves in day- to- day operation, the question must be asked, “Who will be held accountable?”
5. *The Board Monitors Performance:* The board constantly monitors progress toward district ends and compliance with written policies using data as the basis for assessment. There is a moral obligation to the community to determine whether the authority given to the superintendent is being used as intended. Thus, the importance of evaluations. Without clear indicators, vision, mission, goals, etc., there is no valid way to measure progress and compliance. Boards must master the skill of constructively using data.
 6. *The Board Takes Responsibility For Itself:* The board, not the superintendent, takes full responsibility for board activity and behavior – the work it chooses to do and how it chooses to do the work. The board’s role as trustee for the community is unique and essential to both the district and the community. Professional development is vital and cost-effective to assuring that the board assumes this responsibility in a manner that benefits students and community alike.
- c. **Mission and Vision.** The Tonasket School District is “focused on learning and linking learning to life.” Each of our students is an extraordinary individual who embraces life with hope, independence, accountability, resilience, and commitment to community and to the betterment of society. They are life-long learners who possess the skills to think critically, act intelligently, work creatively, and confidently adapt to an ever-changing world.
- d. **Tonasket School District Goals.**
- **Powerful Teaching and Learning.** Ensure that each student is a creative, accountable, and independent learner by combining high expectations with demonstrated growth, while leveraging technology and an aligned curriculum that is rigorous and relevant. Hire and retain engaged and highly qualified staff, providing them with the training and support necessary to inspire student success.
 - **Stewardship.** Instill trust and engender public support through the planned, prudent and transparent use of district resources, driven always by a focus on student learning.
 - **District Culture and Climate.** Embrace a welcoming and collaborative school climate that encourages staff and student initiative, dynamic learning, a sense of community, and ethical decision-making while promoting and valuing mutual respect, safety, health and our rural heritage.
 - **College, Career, Life Readiness.** Facilitate varied pathways to prosperity through partnerships, mentoring, and use of district resources, equipping students with the life skills, knowledge, motivation and tenacity to excel in post-secondary pursuits
 - **Creative and Innovative.** Nurture passion and creativity, celebrate success, and foster hope. Cultivate and model self-advocacy, independent learning, and belief in self. Embrace and value diversity. Address barriers to learning, including poverty, through cultural awareness, professional development, and an intentional focus. Ensure that each student begins school ready to learn and transitions confidently through proactive assessment and early intervention.

- ***Parent and Community Engagement.*** Engage our diverse community in partnerships that support families, learning at home, making educational decisions, and collaborations. Establish clear and consistent communication that unites all citizens around the principle that high quality public education is a community’s most valuable asset.

e. **Core Values.** The Board commits to the following values, and will:

1. Believe that all students can learn and succeed at a high level.
2. Deliberate in many voices, but govern as one. It will encourage vigorous and thorough examination of all sides in debate, then take a board vote in order to ‘speak’ with one voice by putting its decisions in writing.
3. Cultivate a sense of group responsibility, understanding that the Board, not the staff or administration, is responsible for excellence in governance.
4. Actively lead the district through policies that provide a clearly articulated vision for the district with a shared understanding of the community’s desired end results, broad and clearly written values and principles to guide the staff in operational planning, and continual monitoring of district, school, and student performance.
5. Uphold high standards of excellence in governance, including a willingness to hold itself and individual Board members accountable for their actions.
6. Insist on the pursuit of excellence by all those who have a role in the school district – staff, students and Board members.
7. Continually monitor its own process, performance and progress.
8. Commit, both individually and collectively, to being well-informed on local, state and national educational issues.
9. Formally and informally recognize and celebrate school, staff and student success.
10. Regularly communicate with all stakeholders about school district performance, direction, initiatives, issues and ideas.
11. Vigorously and intelligently advocate for the school district and its students at the local, state and national level.
12. Always strive to act in the interest of what is best for all students.
13. Serve as a model of positive professional and ethical conduct.

II. **Board Authority.**

The authority exercised by the School Board is derived from the state constitution, state laws pertaining to schools, and policies established by the Board itself.

- a. **Washington State Constitution.** Washington has the strongest language of any of the 50 states with regard to support of public education:

Article IX, Section 1 of the Washington State Constitution states: “It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.”

Article IX, Section 2 also states: “The legislature shall provide for a general and uniform system of public schools.”

- b. **Revised Codes of Washington (State Law).** Washington state law empowers the Board with specific and broad authority over the administration of Tonasket schools. For example, legislation assigns to the Board responsibility (and requisite authority) to set policy for the district, prescribe a course of study, ensure quality in the education program and curriculum standards, employ and evaluate the superintendent, determine instructional hours, adopt a budget,

and approve curriculum and textbooks.

Reference: RCW 28A.150.230; RCW 28A.315; RCW 28A.320; RCW 28A.330; RCW 28A.343; RCW 28A.405.100, BP 1000, BP 1005, BP 1630

- c. **Board Policy.** The Board of Directors functions not as a full-time manager responsible for the day-to-day administration of the school district, but as a part-time governing board responsible for establishing a district-wide vision for student learning, setting policy for carrying out that vision, and monitoring progress to ensure, on behalf of the community it serves, that our district achieves what is desired while avoiding unacceptable situations or conditions that should be avoided.

Because it is not a full-time body, the Board exercises its authority primarily through written policy. All aspects of Board and district operations are governed by policy.

The Board governs its own operations through policies that guide (and give authority to) the board chair and guide individual board members (who exercise authority only when convened as a board).

While the Board has broad authority over the Tonasket schools, much of its authority over day-to-day operations must be delegated to the Superintendent and other full-time employees who serve continuously.

Reference: RCW 28A.150.230; RCW 28A.320.015; RCW 28A.400.010; RCW 28A.400.030

- d. **Authority of Individual Board Members.** Individual Board members have no authority except through the actions of the Board. The statements or actions of individual Board members do not obligate the Board, except when authorized by an official act of the Board. Board members should never speak or act, nor imply they are speaking or acting, on behalf of the Board or the school district when they have not been so authorized by the Board.

Reference:

- e. **Authority of the Superintendent.** The Superintendent acts under the delegated authority of the Board to bring about organizational end results that the Board has established in writing, while ensuring that the district operates within limits also established by the Board in writing. As long as the district remains in accord with the Board's written policies, the Superintendent has full authority over the district and can select the means by which to achieve Board-established ends.

Reference: RCW 28A.330.010; RCW 28A.33.050

III. Elective Office

- a. **Election of Directors.** The Tonasket Board of Directors is a five member, non-partisan Board. Board members serve four-year terms, with two or three members up for election every odd-numbered year.

Reference: RCW 28A.343

- b. **Board Member Qualifications.** To be eligible to serve on the Board of Directors, individuals must be citizens of the United States and the State of Washington, and registered voters residing within the boundaries of the Tonasket School District and within the boundaries of an appropriate director district. Employees of the district may not serve on the Board.

Beyond those minimum statutory requirements, it is expected that Board members share a commitment to providing an exceptional educational experience for all students, a willingness to work and study to become well-versed in board governance, public education in general, and Tonasket schools in particular, and a sincere desire to be part of a high-functioning governing

body that takes the responsibilities of public service seriously.

Reference: RCW 28A.343.340, BP 1105, BP 1113

- c. **Filing for Election.** In order for an individual's name to be placed on the November ballot, he/she must file for election at the Okanogan County Auditor's office during the designated filing period - usually one week in May/June of odd-numbered years for those positions up for election/reelection in November.

Reference: RCW 29A.24, BP 1110

- d. **Filling a Vacancy on the Board.** If a vacancy occurs between elections, the Board fills the vacancy by appointment. The Board will publicize the vacancy, seek applications, and interview selected finalist candidates. The appointment of an individual to fill a Board vacancy will be effective until the next scheduled Board election, when the appointed member's seat will be on the ballot, either to fill the remaining two years of the term or to serve a new four year term, whichever is applicable.

Reference: RCW 28A.343.370, BP 1110, BP 1113, BP 1114

- e. **Resignations.** To resign, a director must provide written notice. Upon receipt of such notice, the Board will announce it at its next regularly scheduled meeting. The resignation is effective immediately unless otherwise noted, in which case it may be withdrawn until the effective date. Directors who have submitted a resignation may not vote on the selection of a replacement.

Reference: BP 1114

IV. Board Administration and Boardsmanship

- a. **Board Member Orientation.** As part of its commitment to good governance, the Board will provide orientation opportunities for new members and candidates. Once candidates for the Board are known, they will be offered this handbook, and given access to the district's strategic plan, the district budget, a copy of the most recent district evaluation, Board self-evaluation, and other appropriate materials.

Upon election to the Board, newly elected members will be provided an orientation opportunity, including the opportunity to participate in professional development offered by the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA), even if such opportunity occurs before being officially sworn in.

Reference: RCW 28A.320.050; BP 1112

- b. **Oath of Office.** Upon election or appointment, before being seated each board member takes an oath or affirmation "to support the Constitution of the United States and the state of Washington and to faithfully discharge the duties of the office according to the best of his or her ability."

Reference: RCW 28A.343.360, BP 1111

- c. **Individual Board Member Duties and Job Expectations.** As an elected public official, an individual Board member owes ultimate allegiance to the public. In addition, the Board expects individual board member commitment to boardsmanship principles and the collective effectiveness of the Board.

Reference:

- d. **Compensation.** Tonasket School Directors have made a decision not to receive compensation for attendance at meetings. Expenses occurred for professional development and other approved activities will be reimbursed under TSD guidelines.

Reference: RCW 28A.343.400, BP 1731

- e. **Conflict of Interest.** A conflict of interest is considered to exist whenever a board member is or may reasonably appear to be in a position to request or receive, directly or indirectly, anything of value for or on account of his or her influence as a member of the Board of Directors.

Board members are expected to tell colleagues whenever they have an interest in an issue that might compromise or call their judgment into question, and to refrain from voting on that issue.

Reference: RCW 42.52; BP 1610

- f. **Board Member Professional Development.** The Board is committed to continuous improvement, and understands that in order to perform at a high level, its members must be well informed about the Tonasket schools, board governance, and educational best practices. The Board will offer professional development opportunities, and members are encouraged to take part in these opportunities. The district will reimburse members for reasonable in-state and pre-approved out-of-state expenses for professional development.

Examples of these professional development opportunities include annual conferences, regional meetings, workshops or training sessions conducted by WSSDA, NSBA conferences, and other similar and relevant opportunities.

Board members are also expected to read, share and exchange professional articles from school board and governance publications and journals.

Reference:

- g. **Indemnification of Board Members.** Washington law provides that the school district must indemnify and hold school employees, volunteers and Board members harmless from any claim, demand or judgment from negligence in the performance of their duties and responsibilities. This protection includes legal fees, expenses and other costs. An exception to this indemnification is malfeasance on the part of the Director.

Reference: RCW 28A.320.060; RCW 28A.320.100

- h. **Discipline of Board Members.** Board members are independently elected by the public, and answer directly to the public. They may freely disagree with other members regarding actions of the Board or directions taken by the district. Vigorous and full debate of issues is a hallmark of good boardsmanship, so the board majority will not suppress independence of thought.

But in cases where a member violates board policies, interferes with the orderly and efficient operation of the district, or acts in ways contrary to the best interests of the district, those actions may be subject to informal or formal response by the full Board. Such action will be used rarely, if at all.

In most cases, informal action calls for a fellow member or the Board Chair to speak privately with the Board member about the infraction, reminding him/her of their mutually agreed upon governing commitments. If informal conversation is not successful or in more serious circumstances, the principle of progressive response applies.

The Board has the option, for example, of speaking out publicly or taking a vote of censure. Censure is an expression of Board disapproval concerning the actions of an individual member. Service as a Board officer is a privilege and not a right, so (although this would be a highly unusual action) Board officers can be removed from their officer position by a majority vote of the Board. The Board of Directors cannot remove individuals from the Board itself except in cases of excessive absenteeism.

Reference: RCW 28A.343.390; BP 1450

V. Communication and Involvement

- a. **Board Member Requests for Information.** It is important for Board members to be informed about the school district and the performance of its students. The Superintendent regularly provides Board members with information via the pre-meeting Board packet and presentations at Board meetings. Board members who seek additional information are encouraged to route such requests through the Superintendent. If the information sought by individual Board members is not readily available without an amount of staff effort that the Superintendent deems significant, Board members will be asked to obtain the approval of the Board majority so that information requests do not result in unnecessarily high cost or unnecessarily distract staff from their primary responsibilities. Under no circumstances do board members engage in an investigation of staff or student issues. An exception is that the Board could engage in the investigation of Superintendent misconduct under the guidance of the NCESD Superintendent or legal counsel.
Reference:
- b. **Student Information.** Except for statutorily mandated exceptions, such as disciplinary hearings, Board members do not get involved with individual student matters. Individual student information is confidential and Board members only have access to such information when it is necessary for performing a function in their official capacity. This includes not sharing names of students with other board members if a parent has contacted an individual director.
Reference: The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99)
- c. **Visits to Schools.** Board members are encouraged to become informed about Tonasket schools, and visits to our schools can be part of that process. Although informal and unannounced travel on campus is sometimes unavoidable, if a Board member wishes to visit one or more of our schools as a Board member he/she should first inform the Superintendent, so the Superintendent can coordinate with the school principal to schedule a visit. While visiting schools, Board members keep in mind that they are inevitably seen as Board members even when their intended involvement is as a parent (e.g., back-to-school nights) or as a community member (e.g. at athletic events). They should also remember that they do not serve in an administrative capacity and should not attempt to direct, criticize or otherwise interfere with staff members performing their duties.
Reference:
- d. **Administrative/Program Director Contacts.** Board members may meet with administrators and department heads to obtain information. Individual members are not able to set direction, and thus may not issue any directives. Meetings should be first approved by the superintendent. If the superintendent is not available prior to the meeting he/she must be informed that the meeting took place. The chair of the board or its designee will periodically visit with administrators and program directors as a sign of good will from the board and to get a sense of the mood of the district. Casual interactions with administrators and/or program directors do not require superintendent notification unless, during the interaction, something substantive was discussed.
- e. **Dealing with Citizen or Staff Concerns.** When a director or the superintendent is contacted by a community member or a staff member who has a complaint, he/she will:
 - 1. Listen attentively to the individual's or group's concerns while exerting caution to avoid giving the appearance of agreeing. Remember that anything a director says might be understood as the position of the board or superintendent, which an individual does not have the authority to give; additionally, the director will attempt to kindly redirect the conversation before too much information is obtained. If the director has been given too much

information, and the matter comes before the board (see “Chain of Command”), the director must recuse him or herself.

2. Inquire if these concerns have been addressed with the person immediately responsible. If this has not been done, directions will be given on how to contact that person;
 3. Explain the district process for resolving concerns and conflicts (“chain of command”) which is as follows:
 - a. The concern is addressed at the level of occurrence i.e. teacher, coach, bus driver, etc.
 - b. If satisfaction or resolution is not obtained, then the concern is brought to that person’s supervisor, i.e. principal or program director.
 - c. If satisfaction or resolution is still not obtained, the concern is brought to the superintendent.
 - d. If there is still no satisfaction or resolution, the concern may be scheduled as an agenda item for the school board.
 4. Board practice is to carefully examine the evidence presented before taking action.
 5. Complaints against individuals, individual student issues, and most staff grievances will be addressed during executive session unless the person named chooses open session.
 6. All such conversations will be reported to the superintendent in a timely fashion. Under no condition will an individual board member investigate any situation.
- f. **Media.** The Board Chair serves as spokesperson for the Board. The Superintendent serves as spokesperson for the District. If an individual member must, for some necessary reason speak to the media, he/she must inform the media he/she is not speaking for the Board, and should be certain to be respectful, stay focused on the issue, refuse to be intimidated, and feel free not to respond. If taken by surprise, one may inform the media that this is not a convenient time and you will get back to him/her. For hot topics for which you suspect you may be contacted, it may be useful to prepare a brief statement to keep near the phone.
- Reference:** BP 1220

VI. Board Structure and Functions

- a. **Board Officers.** The Board of Directors has three officers: chair, vice-chair, and legislative representative. The Board elects officers at its Annual Meeting, which will occur at the first regular meeting at which newly-elected board members are seated in election years and at the first regular meeting in December in non-election years. Officers are elected by roll call vote.

The Board chair presides over all meetings and ensures that the Board follows its agreed-upon operating protocol. The Board chair, working closely with the Superintendent, plans and approves meeting agendas and may call special meetings of the Board. He/she also serves as the Board spokesperson. He/she is responsible for appointing Board members to committees, and signing documents on behalf of the Board.

The Vice-chair presides over meetings when the chair is absent, assists the chair in planning meeting agendas, and is responsible for board self-monitoring, including assigning and collecting meeting self-assessments. In the event of the temporary absence or disability of both the chair and vice chair, the board of directors may elect a president pro tempore who shall discharge all the duties of chair during such temporary absence or disability.

The legislative representative represents the Board at state association legislative assemblies/conferences and the annual delegate assembly, and keeps the Board informed of legislative issues throughout the year.

Reference: RCW 28A.330.010-040; BP 1210, BP 1220, BP 1225

- b. **Board Advisory Committees.** The Board understands that not all of its work can be done in regularly scheduled meetings, so in order to dedicate the necessary time and focus on issues it is sometimes necessary to form committees.

A committee is formed only by vote of the Board, and only for the purpose of preparing recommendations for action to be taken to the full Board. Board committees never act in place of the entire Board. A board committee is composed of two Board members appointed by the Board chair. When formed, each committee will be given a specific charge and a specific time frame for completing its work, typically concluding with information and recommendations to be brought to the full Board for action.

Reference: BP 1240

- c. **District Advisory Committees.** The district may convene advisory committees for the purpose of helping the Superintendent prepare recommendations for Board action. Examples include the statutorily mandated Instructional Materials Committee that advises on curriculum and textbook selection, and facilities advisory committees that prepare recommendations for maintenance and upgrade of facilities that may result in a levy or bond proposal.

District committees are normally considered advisory to the Superintendent, and are therefore considered to be within the Superintendent's delegated authority.

Reference: RCW 28A.320.230

- d. **Board Work-Study Sessions.** The Board may schedule work-study sessions to investigate issues in greater depth than can be done at a regular board meeting. Notice will be given just as if a regularly scheduled Board meeting is to be held, and the meetings are open to the public. In these meetings, the Board's work is similar to that of an advisory committee, preparing actions to be brought to the Board in a regular meeting. No action is taken. Rather, the Board in these meetings operates as a 'committee of the whole' whose work is similar to that of an advisory committee, preparing actions to be brought to the Board in a regular meeting.

Reference: RCW 42.30, The Open Meetings Act

- a. **Board Policymaking.** One of the three major work products of the Board is policy that serves as guidance for the effective and efficient operation of the school district. Board policies are developed in accordance with Washington laws and regulations, and in alignment with the Board's other policies. It is important that Board policies be regularly reviewed and updated, which in addition to the adoption of new policies, is solely the responsibility of the Board.

Reference: RCW 28A.150.230

- b. **Board Hearings.** One of the responsibilities of the Board of Directors is to conduct hearings. For many of these, such as student disciplinary hearings and employee personnel hearings, the Board serves as an impartial hearing panel. In these instances, Board members must make their decision based only on evidence and information presented at the hearing (see Section V.e.1). Regardless of whether the Board is serving as an impartial panel, or in a grievance hearing, Board members have an obligation to treat those coming before them respectfully and fairly, adhering to the highest standards of professional conduct.

Reference: See (for example) WAC 392-400-310

- c. **Budget Process.** The Board is responsible for the adoption of a budget for the school district. The Superintendent presents a proposed budget to the Board on an annual basis, usually in July. Prior to budget adoption, the Board holds a public hearing in which it will consider presentations from school district administrators, and public comments.

Reference: RCW 28A.505.060

- d. **Hiring the Superintendent.** The search for and selection of a Superintendent is one of the most important decisions that a Board of Directors can make. Accordingly, this process should be thoughtful and informed, made with a clear understanding of the needs of the district and knowledge of candidate qualifications. Although each search is unique, generally the Board follows a process that includes consulting with the public, staff, and other informed individuals to identify district needs and qualifications desired in a candidate, and carefully researching candidates' backgrounds, before making its selection.
Reference: RCW 28A.400.010
- e. **Hiring Staff.** In accordance with state law, the Board reserves to itself official confirmation of the Superintendent's hiring decisions. Nevertheless, except when hiring the Superintendent, the Board does not exercise a primary role in the hiring process. The Board delegates authority over the selection process to the Superintendent, who will identify the best-qualified personnel for hiring without direct involvement on the part of Board members.
Reference: RCW 28A.400.300, RCW 28A.400.010, RCW 28A.400.030, BP 1620
- f. **Assignment of Responsibility to the Superintendent.** Under state law the Superintendent is the board secretary and chief executive of the district. He/she is responsible for leading and managing the school district, hiring and supervising personnel, developing and administering the budget, and advising the Board on educational trends and research, board policies and applicable laws. The Superintendent regularly communicates to the Board the district's progress in achieving desired results for students.
Reference: RCW 28A.330.050, RCW 41.59.020, RCW 28A.400.030
- g. **Delegation of Authority to the Superintendent.** The Board of Directors delegates to the Superintendent sufficient authority to enable him/her to administer district operations and accomplish desired results while complying with applicable laws, regulations, and policies.
Reference: BP 1620
- h. **Superintendent Accountability.** The Superintendent is the only school district employee directly supervised by the Board of Directors. The Board evaluates the Superintendent's performance, and makes decisions concerning his/her employment contract, including job expectations, compensation, and contract length (up to the statutory limit of 3 years).
Reference: BP 1630
- i. **Board Accountability.** With regard to its governance responsibilities, the Board holds itself accountable through a self-evaluation process. The Board will review its conduct during board meetings, its adherence to policy, its treatment of the public, staff and one another, its focus on student achievement, and its maintenance of the Board-Superintendent relationship. As part of the self-evaluation process, the Board solicits feedback from district administrators, and when reviewing its board process policies and board-superintendent relations policies each year.
Reference:

VII. Board Meetings

- a. **The Board Does its Work in Meetings.** Meetings are where the Board does its work, because the Board is only really 'the Board' when convened. The Board is a collective body and by statute can only act when a quorum is assembled in a legally constituted meeting. Between meetings individual Board members or two members working together can do 'pre-board' work, preparing work to be brought to the Board for action, but cannot substitute their own actions for those of the Board.
Reference: RCW 42.30, Open Meetings Act

- b. Communications Outside of Meetings.** Because the Board performs its work in view of the public, caution must be taken in all communications outside of meetings to prevent violation of the public trust. Phone calls, letters, emails, faxes, and conversations, in effect all forms of communication, must be limited to prevent the possibility of the occurrence of a ‘serial meeting,’ a de facto meeting that takes place by contacts between more than two board members outside of a public meeting. If three members “discuss, consider, review, evaluate, or take action” through any means, (including one member speaks to another and then that one speaks to yet another), a meeting has taken place.

Allowed emails include (as quoted from Stevens, Clay, Manix, P.S.):

- i. An email sent to the Superintendent, not copied to or used in a series of emails with other Board members
- ii. The Superintendent can send an email to an individual Board member as long as it is not part of a series of emails in which the transaction of official business occurs.
- iii. One Board member can send an email to another that is not part of a series of emails.
- iv. All Board members can send emails about matters that do not involve public business;
- v. Emails may be sent to other Board members as long as they are “passively received” but not “considered” – assuming one can figure out what that means...

Violations will result in fines and possibly assignment of attorney fees. All public records, which include any writing of any form containing information relating to the conduct of the board, are subject to disclosure except for narrowly construed exemptions. Most public records are subject to retention by the District according to state guidelines.

- c. General Meeting Structure.** Board meetings are structured to do the work of the Board. The general meeting structure of the Tonasket Board is guided by Board Policies 1400-1450 and Board Procedures 1400 and 1420. In general, regular meetings will be conducted using the following template:

1. Call to Order
2. Flag Salute
3. Additions of Deletions to the Agenda
4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting
5. Hearing of Individuals or Groups
6. Consent Agenda
7. Reports
8. Unfinished Business
9. New Business
10. Policy Updates
11. Miscellaneous
12. Items for Next Board Agenda
13. Executive Session
14. Adjournment

Reference: Board Procedure 1420

- d. Annual Meeting.** At the first regular meeting at which newly-elected board members are seated in election years (the first meeting following final certification of the election) and at the first regular meeting in December in non-election years, the Board holds its Annual Meeting. Newly elected Directors are sworn in and seated with the Board, and the board will elect from among its members a chair and a vice-chair to serve one-year terms and a legislative representative to serve a two-year term. A newly appointed board member will not be eligible to serve as an officer

unless a majority of the board has been appointed. It also sets the days and times of regular Board meetings.

Reference: RCW 28A.343.360, BP 1210

- e. **Meeting Schedule.** The Board normally meets on the second and last Wednesday of each month.
Reference: RCW 28A.343.380, BP 1400
- f. **Notice of Meetings.** Except in truly emergent circumstances, all Board meetings must be posted at least twenty-four hours in advance with its agenda posted on the website. Board members receive meeting agendas and relevant documents and materials prior to meetings, normally 3-4 days prior to a meeting. Public notice is not required for some quasi-judicial matters nor for some matters connected to collective bargaining.
Reference: RCW 42.30, BP 1400, BP 1410
- g. **Public Records Requests.** Because of its public nature, the Board is obligated to conduct its business in as transparent a way as possible. All Board documents must be made available to the public promptly on request, with limited provisions for the redaction of confidential information. With the exception of portions of meetings conducted in executive session, the public is welcome to attend all Board meetings to witness the Board performing its responsibilities.
Reference: RCW 42.30.010
- h. **Regular Meetings.** Regular meetings of the Board are those meetings listed on its annual calendar, which is revised each July for the following year. Board meetings are generally held at the District Office at 7:00 pm. The Board may choose to hold some meetings at other sites and/or times with proper notice.
Reference: RCW 42.30.075, BP 1400
- i. **Special Meetings.** Meetings of the Board that are not on the annual agenda are special meetings. Special meetings are called for a specific purpose, and may consist of a single agenda item. At a special meeting, the Board cannot add items on an ad hoc basis to the meeting agenda for discussion or action.
Reference: RCW 42.30.080, BP 1400
- j. **Board Quorum.** Three members of the Board constitute a quorum. Unless otherwise specified by law or board policy, a majority of board members present and voting on a particular item (this could be two members of three present) is sufficient for approval. Appointment of new members and hiring of the Superintendent are examples requiring a majority of all board members (three members of five).
Reference: RCW 28A.343.390, BP 1400
- k. **Public Comment at Meetings.** The Board benefits from input by the public on matters that are, or may become, issues that the Board must address.

The Board provides an agenda item at the beginning of each meeting for public comment, enabling any individual or group to address the Board on any subject that is not specifically listed on the agenda. Speakers are asked to identify themselves by name and address. Three minutes may be allotted to each speaker and a maximum of twelve (12) minutes per topic, although the Board chair may extend this time, as he/she deems appropriate. The Board may modify these limitations at the beginning of a meeting if the number of persons wishing to speak makes it advisable to do so. No inappropriate or disrespectful conduct is allowed. Persistence in such conduct will be grounds for termination by the chair of that individual's privilege to speak and, if disruptive behavior continues, removal from the meeting.

The public comment portion of a meeting is an opportunity for Board members to hear from the public. It is not for Board members to engage in discussion or debate with members of the public. Accordingly, Board members will not normally comment on or respond to such public comments except to ask clarifying questions. The Superintendent may provide information if appropriate, or may have a staff member meet informally with those who bring a matter to the Board. The Board Chair acknowledges input received and may, if needed, ask the Superintendent to look into the matter and report back to the Board.

In addition to the initial public comment period, members of the public will also normally be able to speak on individual agenda items as they are considered. The Chair will recognize those who wish to speak to the Board on an issue before a vote is taken.

Reference: BP 1400, BP 1430

- l. Meetings.** The Superintendent, guided by the board's adopted annual agenda, prepares a meeting agenda for each Board meeting. The Chair reviews and finalizes its contents, and approves it on behalf of the Board. Meeting agendas, along with necessary supporting documents and materials, are distributed to Board members no later than the Friday before the meeting, placed on the school website, and offered for publication in the local newspaper. Board agendas are designed to ensure focused, informed discussion on student learning and related educational issues that the Board will be addressing. Board agendas do not include matters that are unnecessary, trivial, or are best addressed at the staff level. A Board member wishing to suggest an agenda item will notify the Chair and/or the Superintendent who will confer with the Board Chair prior to adding the item to the agenda. In the event the suggestion is not acted on, the Board member may make a motion at the beginning of the meeting to add the item, and if the Board majority approves, it will be added at that time.

Reference:

- m. Consent Agenda.** Agenda items that require a Board vote but do not require discussion are placed on the consent agenda. Examples include hiring actions, travel approvals, routine financial transactions, and other legal obligations. A Board member wishing to discuss an item should make a motion to have the item taken off the consent agenda, and if the Board majority approves, it will be removed for discussion as a separate agenda item. A Board vote to approve the consent agenda approves all items remaining on the consent agenda.

Reference:

- n. Preparation for Meetings.** Board members are expected to prepare for meetings by reading all materials provided in the 'Board Packet,' seek clarification or additional information as needed, and discuss concerns or proposals with the Board Chair and/or Superintendent, all before the meeting.

Reference: BP 1220

- o. Board Member Attendance.** Because service as a School Director is a public trust undertaken on behalf of our community, board members are expected to attend all scheduled meetings. If a personal or professional conflict prevents attendance, a member may request to be excused and a majority of the board may excuse him or her, but this should be a rare occurrence. Repeated, unexcused absences constitute the only statutory reason available to the Board to declare a position vacant.

Members are expected to arrive on time. Those who cannot arrive on time should give timely notification to the Board Chair, but out of respect to attendees meetings should proceed as scheduled if a quorum is present.

Reference: RCW 28A.343.390, RCW 42.12.010, BP1450, BP 1220

- p. **Meeting Norms.** The Board of Directors commits itself to be a professional body whose meetings are models of appropriate behavior for the school district. Board members are expected to dress appropriately for all public meetings.

In order to ensure that meetings are as effective and useful as possible, members will avoid surprises by directing their questions or specific concerns, in advance, to the Board Chair or the Superintendent.

The Board believes that informed, respectful and thorough discussion, and even rigorous debate is the best means of arriving at good decisions for the school district. Accordingly, during discussion Board members will listen attentively, consider all points of view, support their positions with evidence, be prepared to answer questions from other Board members, focus on the issue at hand, avoid negative and personal comments, and be prepared to compromise, understanding that the goal of debate among Board members is not to prevail but to arrive at the best possible decision.

Board meetings are meetings held in public, not public meetings. Therefore, most comments should be addressed to the other board members and superintendent, not to the audience. Board members requesting information from staff at board meetings will do so through the superintendent.

All items addressed to the board for action or discussion will be given in an objective fashion explaining both the desired outcomes and the potential consequences of the decisions. Board members, who feel that they do not have enough information, or need more time for consideration, will table a motion, or request a postponement on further discussion until adequate information is provided.

Reference:

- q. **Robert's Rules.** The Board conducts its meetings using *Robert's Rules of Order*, as modified by Board policy, which states it will be used as a guide. Modifications reflect our smaller size and less formalized setting than that of a large legislative body, which must rely on a stricter adherence to Robert's Rules. The Board Chair serves as parliamentarian, but the Chair's rulings can be overturned by majority vote of the Board.

Reference: RCW 28A.330.030; BP 1400

- r. **Voting.** The Board is a collective body and, as such, only acts via a vote of its members. Votes are taken in public at a properly posted meeting of the Board, and are recorded in writing. Motions are made by one board member and seconded by another before they are considered for action. Members may vote for or against a motion, or abstain from voting. Members may explain their intended vote during Board discussion, but they are not required to do so. Once a final decision has been made on a proposal, board members and the superintendent will individually and collectively publicly support successful implementation.

Reference: RCW 42.30.060

- s. **Executive or Closed Sessions.** Although as a public body the Board must meet and conduct its business in public, under certain narrowly-defined exceptions the Board may need to exclude the public from a portion of its meeting by calling an executive session. Permissible reasons for holding an executive session are limited by law. They include but are not limited to discussion of district positions in collective bargaining, evaluation of an employee, reviewing candidates for appointment to the Board, pending claims and litigation, consideration of real estate purchases or sales, and student disciplinary matters. Although the law allows for discussion while in executive session, any subsequent action to be taken by the Board must occur when the Board is reconvened in open session.

All discussions that occur during executive and closed sessions are privileged and shall not be shared with anyone unless it is the express decision of the board to do so. Violation of this confidentiality is punishable by law.

Reference: Open Public Meetings Act, RCW 42.30.110, BP 1410

- t. Meeting Minutes.** In order to appropriately inform the public of the Board's work, Board minutes should contain the time of the meeting; members in attendance; a brief description of any business transacted by the Board, along with any Board action; the recording of Board member votes; and a description of any executive session held.

Changes on minutes will be called to the district secretary. An updated copy of the minutes will be given to each board member and to the public at the scheduled meeting.

Reference: RCW 42.32.030, BP 1440

- u. Board Retreat.** The Board recognizes that it will be necessary to meet occasionally (usually on an annual basis) in a less formal setting to allow for deep discussion of school district and school board matters. Retreats are generally held at times and locations that are different from regularly scheduled meetings. In addition to the attendance of all Board members and the Superintendent, the Board may invite others to participate in its retreat. Members of the public may attend as observers.

Reference: RCW 42.30, The Open Meetings Act

Glossary

High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE)

The HSPE is an assessment administered to students in Grade 10. Students are assessed in the content areas of reading, mathematics, writing and science.

Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA)

The WSSDA serves local boards of education. It is a membership organization made up of all Washington school boards, including 295 school districts.

Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA)

WASA is a statewide, nonprofit, educational administration organization whose membership includes Washington public school Superintendents, assistant Superintendents, central office administrative personnel, state department of education officials, and college and university professors.

Association of Washington State Principals (AWSP)

AWSP is a statewide, nonprofit, educational administration organization whose membership includes principals and assistant principals.

Measures of Student Progress (MSP)

The MSP is the standard assessment administered to students in grades 3 through 8. Students are assessed in the content areas of reading, mathematics, writing, and science (grades 5 and 8).

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)/Public Records Act

FOIA provides for public access to records and meetings of federal agencies. The Public Records Act provides similar access to records of Washington public agencies, including school districts. The Public Disclosure Commission facilitates requests for public information, makes available information about public officials, and provides guidance and rules governing the release of information considered by law to be public.

Educational Service District (ESD)

Washington is divided into nine Educational Service Districts (ESD's). These ESD's are created by the state to serve school districts in the ESD region. Our ESD is the Puget Sound PESD. Each ESD provides a variety of special services that address the educational needs of their customer school districts.

• Acronyms

AYP – Adequate Yearly Progress
ELL – English Language Learners
ESD – Educational Service District
ESEA – Elementary & Secondary Education Act
ESL – English as a Second Language
FERPA – Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
FOIA – Freedom of Information Act
IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP – Individualized Education Program
MSP – Measures of Student Progress
NCLB – No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA version adopted in 2002)
NSBA – National School Board Association

OCR – Office of Civil Rights
OPMA – Open Public Meetings Act
OSPI – Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
PDC – Public Disclosure Commission
PRA – Public Records Act
RTI – Response to Intervention
SGP – Student Growth Percentile
WASA – Washington Association School Administrators
WEA – Washington Education Association
WIAA – Washington Interscholastic Athletic Association
WLI – Washington Learning Index
WSSDA – Washington State School Directors' Association

References

Becoming a Better Board Member – The National School Boards Association’s comprehensive document is a collection of boardmanship principles, best practices and wisdom applicable to public school boards, summarized in four primary areas:

1. **Vision** – Setting the mission and creating a vision for student learning
1. **Structure** – Setting policy to guide district operations
2. **Accountability** – Holding the district accountable for performance
3. **Advocacy** – Speaking out on behalf of students to state and federal policymakers

Key Work of School Boards – NSBA also has written an in-depth description of the school board role and its work, with eight essential areas for Board focus and action:

1. **Vision** – establishing a clear vision of student achievement as a top priority of the Board, staff and community.
2. **Standards** – setting clear standards for student performance.
3. **Assessment** – regular and valid assessment of district and student progress.
4. **Accountability** – holding the school system accountable for student success.
5. **Alignment** – aligning of all district resources to focus on student performance.
6. **Climate** – creating a positive climate throughout the school district to promote student success.
7. **Collaborative Relationships** – building collaborative relationships with the community to promote and develop a consensus and understanding of the priority of student achievement.
8. **Continuous Improvement** – committing everyone in the school district to continuous improvement in the pursuit of student achievement and success.

Robert’s Rules of Order, 10th Edition

<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards.html?css=print>

Appendix A *Key Work of Boards*

Appendix B *ISBA Foundational Principles of Effective Government*

Appendix C *Center for Public Education (CPE) Eight characteristics of effective school boards: full report*

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

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

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

But the answer is: Yes, they do. In this research brief, NSBA’s Center for Public Education looks at indicators of school board effectiveness. From this research, it is clear that school boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-

achieving districts. In the most dramatic examples from this research, scholars compared districts with similar levels of poverty and disadvantage to determine factors that separate high-performing districts from those with low performance. In many cases, these differences included the approaches taken by local school boards.

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

- Boards in high-achieving districts are more likely to engage in goal setting and monitoring their progress.
- They are increasingly data savvy – identifying student needs and justifying decisions based on data.
- Board members possess detailed knowledge of their district, including initiatives to jump-start success.
- Board members have crafted a working relationship with superintendents, teachers, and administrators based on mutual respect, collegiality and a joint commitment to student success.

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

Background on the Studies

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

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

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

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

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

Meta-Analysis: In 2006, J. Timothy Waters and Robert Marzano of Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) examined 27 studies since 1970 that, they concluded, included rigorous quantitative methods to assess the effect of school district leadership on student achievement. Their analysis, *School District Leadership That Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement: Meta-analysis of Influence of District Administrators on Student Achievement*, looked at more than two dozen studies covering more than 2,800 districts and 3.4 million students. Of the 27 studies examined, 14 had information about the relationship between district leadership and average student academic achievement.

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

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

Studies with Comparison Districts: One of the richest data sets available is the Lighthouse I study of the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB). Looking at similar districts with either unusually high or unusually low records on student achievement, the project examined the role of boards and how they relate to student achievement. In studying Georgia districts, Lighthouse I contrasted the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of school board members from high- and low-performing districts. Since conducting this original study in 1998-2000, IASB has expanded the project into an action research approach, identifying pilot districts in Iowa for further testing of this concept (Lighthouse II) and launching a multi-state project focused on board leadership (Lighthouse III). Multiple Lighthouse research papers were cited in this report, including *The Lighthouse Inquiry: School Board/Superintendent Team Behaviors in School Districts with Extreme Differences in Student Achievement* (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2001), *The Lighthouse Research: Past, Present and Future: School Board Leadership for Improving Student Achievement* (Iowa School Boards Foundation, 2007) and in the Thomas Alsbury-edited *The Future of School Board Governance: Relevancy and Revelation* (2008).

Eight Characteristics of an Effective School Board

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision
2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
3. Effective school boards are accountability

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

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

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

Eight Characteristics of "Effective" Boards

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

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

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

"Publicly adopting broad five-year goals for achievement and instruction and consistently supporting these goals, both publicly and privately, are examples of board-level actions that we found to be

driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.

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

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

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

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

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

positively correlated with student achievement,” they said. Typically, they adopted the goals with specific achievement targets and benchmarks. “The board ensures that these goals remain the top priorities in the district and that no other initiatives detract attention or resources from accomplishing these goals.” The districts also provided professional development to board members and examined the effectiveness of such training.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yet in low-achieving districts, board members frequently referred to external pressures as the main reasons for lack of student success. Board members often focused on factors that they believed kept students from learning, such as poverty, lack of parental support, societal factors, or lack of motivation. Board members expected it would take years to see any improvements in student achievement. For these

board members, the reasons for pursuing change often were simple ones – to meet state mandates (and avoid sanctions) and a desire to not “have the lowest test scores” in the state.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Dozen Danger Signs

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

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

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

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

In Lighthouse II (2007), researchers identified five pilot school districts and provided technical assistance and support to the boards based on research findings documented in Lighthouse I. Results from this study also showed that districts made gains when they were able to focus on achievement rather than administrative issues. In the majority of districts, boards spent more than double the amount of time on policy and student achievement than they did prior to Lighthouse II. It was also common for these districts to schedule additional work sessions on student achievement. (More information on Lighthouse II is in the sidebar below).

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

The Lighthouse I studies are particularly relevant in conveying this theme. Looking across high-and low-

descriptions of ineffective boards mentioned in the research:

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

Converting Research to Action: Lighthouse II

Building on the success of Lighthouse I – which identified the different knowledge, beliefs and actions of school boards in high-achieving districts – the Iowa Association of School Boards expanded the initiative to begin

embedding these ideas in other jurisdictions.

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

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

Starting in 2008, IASB launched the Lighthouse III project, through which the association is working with several states to

achieving districts in Georgia, school board members in high-achieving districts had strong communication between the superintendent, staff, and each other. They received information from many sources including the superintendent, curriculum director, principals, teachers and sources

outline best practices for school boards and state school board associations.

outside the district. While the superintendent was a primary source of information, he or she was not the only source. In addition, findings and research were shared among all board members. By comparison, in low-achieving districts, board members expressed concern that not all information was shared or shared equally. As a result, researchers said, “Some felt left out of the information flow.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Togneri and Anderson (2003) also emphasized how effective school boards embraced data. Boards in high-achieving districts were not afraid to confront negative data and, in fact, used it as a basis to improve teaching and learning. In Minneapolis, a renewed emphasis on data has helped drive improvement. Yet back in the mid-1990s, the district showed a wide achievement gap between white and minority students and posted a high school graduation rate barely above 40 percent. When the city’s Chamber of Commerce failed to support the school board’s request for a tax increase, the board began a fundamental rethinking based on goals and data. It hired a new superintendent with a strong foundation in instructional improvement. Together, the board and superintendent developed goals and performance indicators to rank and monitor school progress. This process ultimately helped build trust among school and community leaders, eventually leading to district progress and, later, successful new tax proposals beneficial to schools.

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

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

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

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

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

Lighthouse II, as noted in Alsbury (2008) further reinforced this point. Boards not only took an active interest in professional development but also provided the infrastructure for such programming to succeed. “For most boards, this required significant changes in the allocation of resources (people, time

and money) and would not have happened without a clear understanding of the characteristics of quality professional development and a belief in the importance of improving the knowledge and skills of educators in order to improve student outcomes.”

Additional evidence is available in the Snipes, Doolittle and Herlihy’s 2002 analysis of high- and low-achieving districts. In high-achieving districts, the board and superintendent support uniform professional development built on curriculum. In lower-achieving districts, professional development may vary extensively from school to school. One example was in Sacramento, Calif., where teachers received at least 18 hours of in-service training per year based on uniform curricula. New teachers also received six full days of instructional training, and teachers had common planning periods to encourage collaboration on lesson plans and strategies to address student needs. In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., schools, weeklong seminars for Advanced Placement teachers, leadership retreats for principals and financial support for attaining national board certification were among effective strategies by the district to improve curriculum.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, LaRocque and Coleman (1993) illustrated the value of both formal and informal learning activities for board members. According to these researchers, effective school districts in Canada offered a mixture of learning activities for their board members, or “trustees,” including retreats, special meetings, work sessions, school visits and even social events. As a result, the trustees had a “willingness to meet regularly with the professionals in the district to discuss what was happening and what should be happening.” This commitment conveyed to staff the importance of district goals and the importance of the staff members’ work in supporting them. In addition, they noted, “The successful boards did not just rely on district staff reports... They obtained information about programs in different ways and from different sources, and sought opportunities to interact directly with administrators and teachers.”

Related Finding: Stability of Leadership

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

Posted January 28, 2011. Copyright Center for Public Education.

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

the American Council on Education, and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, often focusing on issues facing disadvantaged populations. Dervarics has a Bachelor's degree from George Washington University.

[Home](#) > [Public education](#) > [Eight characteristics of effective school boards: At a glance](#) > [Eight characteristics of effective school boards: full report](#)

Another excellent document from the Center for Public Education lists *Eight Characteristics Of Effective School Boards* found through research: (See Appendix ____ for the full report.)

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