



The 8 Characteristics of Effective School Boards

**What does it take to improve student
achievement?**



Key Messages

1. The body of research on the impact that boards can have on student achievement continues to develop.
2. Boards today have a fairly strong understanding of the importance of student achievement and what it takes to improve.
3. Boards need to take a stronger stance on the kinds of governing actions it takes to get results while at the same time finding the right balance as each district transitions and/or moves forward.
4. Our work as an Association is changing to assist school boards in effectively improving student achievement.



A Dozen Danger Signs

Characteristics of ineffective boards mentioned in much of the research:

- Only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives, and seldom able to describe actions being taken to improve student learning.
- 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.
- Offer negative comments about students and teachers.
- Micromanage day-to-day operations.
- Disregard the agenda process and the chain of command.
- Left out of the information flow; little communication between board and superintendent.



A Dozen Danger Signs, cont.

- Quick to describe a lack of parent interest in education or barriers to community outreach.
- Looked at data from a “blaming” perspective, describing teachers, students and families as major causes for low performance.
- Little understanding or coordination on staff development for teachers.
- Slow to define a vision.
- Did not hire a superintendent who agreed with their vision.
- Little professional development together as a board.



The 8 Characteristics of Effective School Boards

- Best Practices
- Change in the status quo
- Change in cultures (starting with the board)
 - Change in the way boards operate and function
 - Change in staff behaviors and techniques
- Continuous plan of improvement for the district
- Greater knowledge of trustees



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

- Internal, urgent desire to improve: a focus on improving for the sake of students
- Adopt a vision statement articulating a belief and commitment to success for all students
- Refuse to make excuses for poor performance or blame external factors
- Can articulate the core purpose, core values and vision of the district
- Realize that to change achievement, you need to fundamentally change attitudes, instructional practice in classrooms. No more “status quo”!!!



2. Effective 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.

- Articulate the Core Values of your district
- Adopt goals for improved achievement and instruction
- Have detailed knowledge about the relationship of goals to curriculum, instruction and assessment
- Ensure that district goals remained the top priorities in the district and that no other initiatives detracted attention or resources from those goals
- Expect to see results
- Believe that the people are capable of improving results



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

- As a district, demand to be held accountable for student performance at all levels (from the board to the classroom)
- Develop policies supporting instructional reform
- Focus on decisions that support improved achievement rather than day-to-day operations



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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 board and staff work as a team (no more “us v. them”)
- Develop a culture of transparency: communication is a 2-way street
- Develop a community relations action plan



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

- Able to describe current levels of student performance, based on assessment data
- Able to describe in detail the types of data used throughout the district
- Discuss data regularly at board meetings
- Use data to diagnose problems
- Engage in frequent data study, on an ongoing basis throughout the year—regular monitoring
- Use data to take corrective action—to determine what additional supports are needed to accelerate improvement



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

- Focus efforts on aligning instructional strategies across buildings—a more uniform approach increases the district’s ability to improve instruction
- Commit to sustaining reform over the long haul—knowing that change takes time
- Support extensive, research-based professional development for teachers as a way to implement needed changes in instruction
- Allocated resources to priorities, including professional development, even in tight budget times
- Limit improvement initiatives to those that could be adequately supported—and said no to initiatives that would distract from their improvement efforts



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

- Keep open lines of communication between the board, individual trustees and the superintendent.
- Eliminate the element of surprise
- Respect each other's roles
- Trust is key!!!



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

- Strong knowledge of achievement issues and their own district efforts
- Periodic work sessions to evaluate work as a policy board and assess their effectiveness in improving student achievement
- Find team learning time important in articulating shared values, developing consensus about what was most important, what it would take to succeed, and at what cost they were willing to pursue it



Food for thought:
Culture: Starts with the Board

Board culture
influences district **culture**
in ways that influence
teaching and learning.

New ways of thinking and doing = new results for kids.

