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# NCSBA Governance Standards for 21st Century School Boards

North Carolina School Boards Association



## A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Vision of School Governance

School board governance is an important issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as evidence mounts on the critical role that boards play in impacting student achievement. School boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than school boards in low-achieving districts. And, this difference appears to carry through among administrators and teachers throughout the districts, according to results of a research study released by the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB). The results show that school boards in districts with high student achievement:

- *Consistently expressed the belief that all students can learn and that the school could teach all students.* This "no excuses" belief system resulted in high standards for students and an on-going dedication to improvement. In low-achieving districts, board members had limited expectations and often focused on factors that they believed kept students from learning, such as poverty, lack of parental support or societal factors.
- *Were far more knowledgeable about teaching and learning issues, including school improvement goals, curriculum, instruction, assessment and staff development.* They were able to clearly describe the purposes and processes of school improvement efforts and identify the board's role in supporting those efforts. They could give specific examples of how district goals were being carried out by administrators and teachers.
- *Used data and other information on student needs and results to make decisions.* The high-achieving boards regularly monitored progress on improvement efforts and modified direction as a result.
- *Created a supportive workplace for staff.* Boards in high-achieving districts supported regular staff development to help teachers be more effective, supported shared leadership and decision making among staff, and regularly expressed appreciation for staff members.

- *Involved their communities.* Board members identified how they connect with and listen to their communities and focused on involving parents in education.

Effective school board governance of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a fluid process whereby boards make the important educational decisions for their local community; continually determine and seek out those local, state and national stakeholders critical to ensuring successful outcomes for students; and operate with transparency as they hold themselves accountable to their communities. Twenty-first century governance must include parents, business and community groups at the table to play a stronger role in addressing educational and societal needs of students.

Strong, collaborative leadership by the governance team is a key cornerstone of the foundation for high student achievement. That leadership is essential to forming a community vision for children, crafting long-range goals and plans for raising the achievement of every child, improving the professional development and status of teachers and other staff, and ensuring that the guidance, support, and resources needed for success are available. The governance team of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must work cooperatively and collaboratively to mobilize their communities to aid in directing the educational services of today's students with future ready skills for optimal success and productivity to face the challenges of tomorrow.

## The Key Work of School Boards

Created in 2000 by the National School Boards Association, the key work of school boards – student achievement and community engagement to promote student achievement – is becoming recognized nationally as the primary agenda for boards of education. Increasingly, as local boards face the challenges of providing effective governance, they are using their time and energy to focus on these twin imperatives. It is no longer either possible or credible

for boards of education to serve as passive reviewers and judges of the work of others. This oversight role, assigned to local boards during the early years of this century as part of progressive efforts to ensure clean government, has been superseded.

Local boards of education should be the “up front” leaders of public education. They are charged with the responsibility to create the conditions within their school districts that will enable students to meet more rigorous knowledge and performance standards. Creating optimum conditions for teaching and learning is a formidable challenge. It requires that boards understand issues deeply and align the resources of culture of the system to support the work of principals, teachers, and students. It means that boards take responsibility for results even as they hold others in the school district accountable as well. It means that boards

articulate the educational mission of the district and garner the public support and resources needed to achieve that mission.

To help local boards carry out their work, the National School Boards Association has developed a framework called the Key Work of School Boards. This framework outlines 8 key areas that boards need to focus attention on:

- VISION
- STANDARDS
- ASSESSMENT
- ACCOUNTABILITY
- ALIGNMENT
- CLIMATE
- COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS
- CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

## THE KEY WORK OF SCHOOL BOARDS

### VISION

Establish a vision for student achievement shared by the school board, superintendent, staff, and community.

### STANDARDS

Set clear learning standards for student achievement.

### ASSESSMENT

Establish an assessment system that periodically measures individual student progress toward standards.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Establish a strong accountability process for the district.

### ALIGNMENT

Align resources to ensure that students meet standards.

### CLIMATE

Create a positive learning environment or climate for improving student achievement.

### COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Build and maintain collaborative relationships between the board and the superintendent, and the leadership team with the community including key political and business leaders to develop support for student achievement as a top community priority.

### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Commit to continuous improvement for student achievement.

The Key Work of School Boards provides a framework for planning and acting that is based on systems thinking. Several frameworks drawn from systems thinking, including the Malcom Baldrige Criteria, are being used to identify, assess, and benchmark quality organizations in business and industry and, more recently, in education and government as well. Systems thinking is guided by the idea that the behavior of systems follows common principles. The elements of a system continually interact and do so in predictable ways. Systems thinking comprises a body of principles, methods, and tools for understanding these interactions and creating more effective systems.

Those who engage in systems thinking understand that there are no right answers. Actions are not taken in isolation. A systems thinker understands that everything is connected to everything else. The goal of systems thinking is to take those actions that will most positively influence the system as a whole. At the same time, every action has a reaction. That is, each action will produce some desired results and, almost certainly, unintended consequences elsewhere in the system. One of the powers of systems think is learning to anticipate those unintended results. Building “worst case scenarios” is one tool for anticipating unintended consequences. Another is to ask the question, “What else may happen if we do this?” Anticipating unintended consequences empowers leaders to modify the original decision or to take additional actions that can mitigate undesired results.

The Key Work of School Boards is a framework designed to foster systems thinking. Using this framework will enable school boards to provide leadership through governance and create the conditions under which excellent teaching and accelerated student performance will take place. We begin with the premise that excellence in the classroom begins with excellence in the boardroom.

Keep in mind that “systems thinking” means just that. The key actions do not represent a laundry list of items for boards to check off one by one; in fact, the opposite is true. To be a systems thinker is to realize that it is the



whole, not its several parts, that makes the difference; these key actions are both linking and interweaving. Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, explains this concept by observing that it is impossible to cut an elephant in half and get two smaller elephants.

## Development and Purpose of the Standards

The mission of the North Carolina School Boards Association (NCSBA), as an advocate for public school education, is to provide leadership and services that enable local boards of education to govern effectively. In the spring of 2007, the North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) established performance standards for superintendents and other central office administrators. These standards have been designed to serve as a tool to aid in the improvement of school district leadership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools and can help focus the goals and objectives of local boards of

education as they support, monitor, and evaluate the performances of their senior executives.

In June 2007, the NCSBA Board of Directors gave Executive Director Ed Dunlap a directive to begin dialogue with the membership with the goal of establishing professional governance standards for NC's 21st Century school boards that would align with the efforts of the SBE. The intended result is a cohesive set of standards that guide the governance team to creating conditions that foster improved achievement levels for all students.

Within the operation of the public education system, it is imperative that the role of the school board be strengthened. The board serves to represent the collective democratic voice of its community. The local board directly employs the superintendent. As a result, the relationship between the school board and its superintendent is vital to establishing a successful climate whereby teaching and learning can occur in the school district. The board and its superintendent make up the local governance team that must master working together to achieve greater student achievement and to engage the community to promote student achievement.

The development of the Professional Governance Standards serves to help define the board's role in preparing future ready students. They will describe principles for the effective local governance of North Carolina's public schools and will be a tool that supports boards in their efforts to govern effectively and enhance the public's understanding about the critical responsibilities of school boards.

## Adoption of the Professional Governance Standards and Beyond

The NCSBA Professional Governance Standards were reviewed by the membership and adopted by the delegates of the 39th NCSBA Annual Conference for Board Member Development.

NCSBA will work on integrating the standards in training modules, workshops, conferences and board assessments to emphasize the board's role in 21st Century education..

### **IASB Research Shows School Boards Make a Difference in Student Achievement**

School boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than school boards in low-achieving districts. And this difference appears to carry through among administrators and teachers throughout the districts, according to results of a research study released in September 2000 by the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB). The results show that school boards in districts with high student achievement:

- ◆ Consistently expressed the belief that all students can learn and that the school can teach all students. This "no excuses" belief system resulted in high standards for students and an on-going dedication to improvement. In low-achieving districts, board members had limited expectations and often focused on factors that they believed kept students from learning, such as poverty, lack of parental support or societal factors.
- ◆ Were far more knowledgeable about teaching and learning issues, including school improvement goals, curriculum, instruction, assessment and staff development. They were able to clearly describe the purposes and processes of school improvement efforts and identify the board's role in supporting those efforts. They could give specific examples of how district goals were being carried out by administrators and teachers.
- ◆ Used data and other information on student needs and results to make decisions. The high-achieving boards regularly monitored progress on improvement efforts and modified direction as a result.
- ◆ Created a supportive workplace for staff. Boards in high-achieving districts supported regular staff development to help teachers be more effective, supported shared leadership and decision making among staff, and regularly expressed appreciation for staff members.
- ◆ Involved their communities. Board members identified how they connect with and listen to their communities and focused on involving parents in education.

## Strategic Leadership

*Summary: Leaders create conditions to strategically revise the district’s vision, mission, and goals to ensure that every high school graduate is globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st Century. They create a climate of inquiry that challenges the community to continually build on the district’s core values and move toward future goals.*

**PRACTICES:**

**Vision**

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



**Standards**

- Encourages community support for standards.
- Provides resources needed to increase the number of students meeting and exceeding standards.

**Assessment**

- Initiates, approves, and monitors policies to ensure a strong assessment system.

**Accountability**

- Adopts an annual superintendent performance plan and ensures that the superintendent’s evaluation includes accountability measures.
- Evaluates itself on board goals related to student achievement.

**Alignment**

- Initiates, approves, and monitors policies to ensure that students are encouraged to challenge themselves by taking higher level courses.

**Climate**

- Provides adequate resources to meet student achievement goals through the budgeting process and monitors the budget regularly.

**Continuous Improvement**

- Adopts board policies that support continuous improvement.

## Instructional Leadership

*Summary: Leaders set high standards for 21st Century instruction and assessment that result in professional learning communities characterized by highly engaging instruction and improved student learning. They hold these communities accountable by setting specific achievement targets for schools and students and ensuring that these targets are met through the consistent use of research-based instructional strategies.*

### PRACTICES:

#### Standards

- Approves standards for student learning.
- Ensures that curriculum, instruction, learning environment, and assessment are aligned with student achievement standards.
- Participates in periodic work sessions to review student standards and the district's initiatives to help all students achieve.
- Provides resources needed to increase the number of students meeting and exceeding standards.
- Ensures that instructional programs are evaluated for effectiveness in helping students meet standards.

#### Accountability

- Establishes an accountability process with measurable criteria and ensures an annual review.
- Recognizes and rewards teachers, educational teams, and schools that consistently produce greater than average student improvement gains.
- Supports the superintendent's recommendation for dismissal when it is warranted.
- Ensures effective and timely communications on the accountability system and progress to parents

and the community.

- Evaluates itself on board goals related to student achievement.
- Uses data on student achievement as a measure to drive decision-making.
- Ensures compliance with state accountability measures.
- Ensures that parents receive annual personalized data on their children's achievement.
- Initiates, adopts, and monitors policies related to accountability.

#### Alignment

- Initiates, approves, and monitors policies to ensure that students are encouraged to challenge themselves by taking higher level courses.
- Considers students' instructional, social, and emotional needs when planning for improved student achievement.
- Ensures staff development that will advance the district's student achievement priorities.
- Ensures a process for selecting textbooks and instructional materials that supports instructional priorities.

#### Climate

- Fosters a culture that supports the belief that all children can learn at higher levels in these ways:
- Employing and supporting a superintendent who shares that philosophy
- Developing and revising policies to reflect this philosophy
- Providing safe schools where a learning environment of trust and respect are top priorities in every school.

- Provides orientation for board candidates and for new board members on expectations for student achievement.
- Approves and monitors programs designed to meet the special instructional needs of students who are not meeting achievement goals or standards.
- Provides adequate resources to meet student achievement goals through the budgeting process and monitors the budget regularly.
- Recognizes and rewards staff and students for high academic achievement and high levels of improvement.
- Conducts all board meetings with curriculum and instruction as a clear focus and student achievement as the clear goal.
- Serves as advocates for excellence in education and higher student achievement in the community and also at the state and federal levels.
- Builds public support for higher student achievement and increases public trust in the district through formal and informal communication and through openness.
- Provides funding for continuous improvement.
- Adopts board policies that support continuous improvement.
- Supports publicly and communicates the value of continuous improvement to the community.

## Cultural Leadership

*Summary: Leaders understand the important role a system's culture plays in its school performance. They understand and value the people of the district and community, their history, their traditions, and their norms of life. Leaders are able to connect with these traditions when appropriate as well as "reculture" the district as necessary to aid the district in moving forward toward the collective and individual goals of improving student and adult learning and infusing the work of students and adults with passion, meaning, and purpose.*

### Collaboration

- Advocates student achievement as a top community priority.

### Continuous Improvement

- Follows a regular process to review student achievement data to ensure continuous improvement.
- Takes part in training on principles of continuous improvement, including use of data and customer focus.
- Participates in work sessions to better understand needed changes in curriculum and instruction based on related data.





**PRACTICES:****Vision**

- Approves a strategic planning process to include stakeholders in creating the vision for student achievement.
- Allocates resources based on the strategic plan.

**Standards**

- Ensures that curriculum, instruction, learning environment, and assessment are aligned with student achievement standards.
- Ensures clear, jargon-free communications about standards that increase the awareness and understanding of parents, students, staff, and community.

- Encourages community support for standards.

**Assessment**

- Ensures effective, user-friendly communications on assessment measures and progress.

**Accountability**

- Ensures effective and timely communications on the accountability system and progress to parents and the community.

**Alignment**

- Considers students' instructional, social, and emotional needs when planning for improved student achievement.
- Ensures school facilities and learning environments that support student achievement goals.

**Climate**

- Provides adequate resources to meet student achievement goals through the budgeting process and monitors the budget regularly.
- Ensures a safe and orderly learning environment in all schools.

**Collaboration**

- Models collaboration and trust.
- Advocates student achievement as a top community priority.
- Initiates, adopts, and monitors policies related to collaboration.
- Provides funding and resources for collaborative efforts.



**Continuous Improvement**

- Takes part in training on principles of continuous improvement, including use of data and customer focus.
- Supports publicly and communicates the value of continuous improvement to the community.

## Human Resources Leadership

*Summary: Leaders ensure that the district is a professional learning community with processes and systems in place to recruit, induct, support, evaluate, develop, and retain high-performing, diverse staff. Leaders use distributed leadership to support learning and teaching and plan professional development and district leadership succession.*

**PRACTICES:****Vision**

- Approves a strategic planning process to include stakeholders in creating the vision for student achievement.
- Communicates the strategic plan.
- Monitors progress toward vision periodically.

**Standards**

- Approves standards for student learning.
- Ensures that curriculum, instruction, learning environment, and assessment are aligned with student achievement standards.
- Ensures clear, jargon-free communications about standards that increase the awareness and understanding of parents, students, staff, and community.

- Encourages community support for standards.
- Provides resources needed to increase the number of students meeting and exceeding standards.

**Assessment**

- Ensures staff development on assessment measures.
- Ensures effective, user-friendly communications on assessment measures and progress.
- Provides funding to support assessment system.

**Accountability**

- Adopts an annual superintendent performance plan and ensures that the superintendent's evaluation includes accountability measures.
- Recognizes and rewards teachers, educational teams, and schools that consistently produce greater than average student improvement gains.
- Ensures effective and timely communications on the accountability system and progress to parents and the community.
- Ensures funding to implement accountability measures.

**Alignment**

- Recognizes and supports the authority of the superintendent to implement a district-wide organizational structure that empowers staff to meet the needs of all students.
- Ensures staff development that will advance the district's student achievement priorities.
- Ensures that technology is integrated into the curriculum to enhance student achievement.
- Ensures school facilities and learning environments that support student achievement goals.

- Approves budget allocations based on student achievement priorities.

### Collaboration

- Ensures a climate of open communications at board meetings and throughout the district.
- Provides funding and resources for collaborative efforts.

### Continuous Improvement

- Provides funding for continuous improvement.

## Community Leadership

*Summary: Leaders design structures and processes to permit broad community engagement with, support for and ownership of the district vision. Acknowledging that strong schools build strong communities, leaders create opportunities for parents, community members, government leaders, and business representatives to participate through investments of resources, assistance, and good will.*

### PRACTICES:

#### Vision

- Approves a strategic planning process to include stakeholders in creating the vision for student achievement.
- Adopts the strategic plan.
- Communicates the strategic plan.
- Initiates and adopts policies needed to support the strategic plan.
- Allocates resources based on the strategic plan.
- Monitors progress toward vision periodically.



#### Standards

- Ensures clear, jargon-free communications about standards that increase the awareness and understanding of parents, students, staff, and community.
- Encourages community support for standards.

#### Assessment

- Ensures effective, user-friendly communications on assessment measures and progress.

#### Accountability

- Recognizes and rewards teachers, educational teams, and schools that consistently produce greater than average student improvement gains.
- Ensures effective and timely communications on the accountability system and progress to parents and the community.
- Ensures funding to implement accountability measures.

#### Alignment

- Ensures that the public understands how aligning curriculum and instruction and implementing standards leads to improved student achievement.

### Climate

- Recognizes and rewards staff and students for high academic achievement and high levels of improvement.
- Serves as advocates for excellence in education and higher student achievement in the community and also at the state and federal levels.
- Ensures a safe and orderly learning environment in all schools.
- Builds public support for higher student achievement and increases public trust in the district through formal and informal communication and through openness.

### Collaboration

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

### Continuous Improvement

- Supports publicly and communicates the value of continuous improvement to the community.

## Political Leadership

*Summary: Leaders promote the success of learning and teaching by understanding, responding to and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, ethical and cultural context. Leaders collaboratively define mutual expectations, policies and goals to ensure the academic success of all students.*

#### PRACTICES:

#### Vision

Communicates the strategic plan.



**Standards**

- Initiates, adopts, and revises policies to support standards.

**Assessment**

- Initiates, approves, and monitors policies to ensure a strong assessment system.

**Accountability**

- Recognizes and rewards teachers, educational teams, and schools that consistently produce greater than average student improvement gains.

**Alignment**

- Ensures that the public understands how aligning curriculum and instruction and implementing standards leads to improved student achievement.

**Climate**

- Recognizes and rewards staff and students for high academic achievement and high levels of improvement.

**Collaboration**

- Fosters collaborative relationships as a board philosophy through
  - Strategic planning
  - Community vision
  - Instructional improvements
  - Continuous improvement
- Participates in work sessions to better understand needed changes in curriculum and instruction based on related data.

## Ethical Leadership

*Summary: Leaders foster the continual development of ethical institutions as they embody the purpose, vision, and values of the system and of the constituents, within an understanding of ethical ideals. They connect the goal of the district with that of the internal employees and external stakeholders. Leaders collaborate to incorporate the best practices, solve problems, and address the issues facing the district. They focus on district success.*

**PRACTICES****Vision**

- Allocates resources based on the strategic plan.

**Standards**

- Encourages community support for standards.

**Accountability**

- Recognizes and rewards teachers, educational teams, and schools that consistently produce greater than average student improvement gains.
- Evaluates itself on board goals related to student achievement (see Vision).

**Alignment**

- Participates in training to better understand how alignment of the following resources are related to student success in meeting standards:
  - Staffing and personnel evaluations
  - Facilities
  - Funding
  - Curriculum and instruction
  - Assessment

- Technology

- Ensures school facilities and learning environments that support student achievement goals.

### Climate

- Provides orientation for board candidates and for new board members on expectations for student achievement.
- Provides adequate resources to meet student achievement goals through the budgeting process and monitors the budget regularly.
- Recognizes and rewards staff and students for high academic achievement and high levels of improvement.
- Models respect, professional behavior, and a commitment to continuous learning with board colleagues, with superintendent and staff, with parents and students, with the community.
- Serves as advocates for excellence in education and higher student achievement in the community and also at the state and federal levels.
- Ensures periodic assessment of school climate throughout the district, including attendance data; discipline data; surveys of students, staff, and parents; enrollment in higher level classes; staff turnover; student enrollment trends.
- Ensures a safe and orderly learning environment in all schools.
- Builds public support for higher student achievement and increases public trust in the district through formal and informal communication and through openness.

### Collaboration

- Provides funding and resources for collaborative efforts.

### Continuous Improvement

- Follows a regular process to review student achievement data to ensure continuous improvement.
- Takes part in training on principles of continuous improvement, including use of data and customer focus.
- Participates in work sessions to better understand needed changes in curriculum and instruction based on related data.
- Provides funding for continuous improvement.
- Supports publicly and communicates the value of continuous improvement to the community.

## Competencies

As lay people, board members rely on the superintendent to present information on student achievement and its complexities in language that is understandable to them and to the public. The superintendent's information is crucial in building trust among the leadership team and with the community--a trust that is necessary to make progress for all students. A good school board does not run the district; rather, it ensures that the district is run well.

- ◆ The board that is focused on raising student achievement concentrates principally on the following actions:
- ◆ Embracing both privately and publicly a united belief that all children can learn and achieve at higher levels.
- ◆ Ensuring involvement of a broad base of stakeholders in creating the vision for the community's schools and supporting the vision both publicly and through board decisions.
- ◆ Committing to training so that all board members have a better understanding of both the



importance and the operations of the eight key areas critical to improving student achievement.

- ◆ Approving comprehensive plans developed with the superintendent's leadership to move the students in the district to higher achievement levels.
  - ◆ Adopting policies needed to support improvement initiatives.
  - ◆ Allocating funding for and alignment of the resources needed to advance student achievement. These resources include, but are not limited to, school facilities, technology, staffing, staff development, instructional materials, and assessment instruments.
  - ◆ Monitoring progress toward district goals and supporting the superintendent in efforts to make changes.
- ◆ Ensuring clear, concise, and user friendly communications about all facets of the district's emphasis on higher student achievement.
  - ◆ Serving as the advocate for building community support for student achievement as a priority with a variety of groups, including public officials, parents, media, and business and community leaders.



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