Key Work of School Boards

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

The Key Work of School Boards is a data-driven framework that aims to help boards achieve excellence in school governance through a roadmap designed to assist and support their work. It is backed by research that identifies the characteristics of effective boards that can lead to improvement and sustainable change in school districts.

Revised in 2015, NSBA’s Key Work of School Boards framework identifies the core skills that effective boards need to ensure that all students achieve at high levels through excellence in governance. Within the Key Work framework, five Key Work action areas are examined in detail:

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

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

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

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

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

Research

- 2009 Iowa Lighthouse Study that examined the school board’s role in improving student achievement. The study suggests that “school board actions are a key part of a ‘culture of improvement.’"
- 2011 Center for Public Education Study: Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards.
- 2013 research by Dr. David Lee of the University of Southern Mississippi found that effective school boards exhibit similar behaviors.
- 2013 research by Michael R. Ford of UW-Oshkosh and Douglas M. Ihrke of UW-Milwaukee found that when school board members who have served for at least five years indicate greater adherence to the Key Work of School Boards, student achievement increases. Specifically, greater
adherence to the Key Work concepts has a statistically significant relationship with a district’s reading proficiency levels, and overall accountability score. Follow-up article by Ford and Ihrke, “Governance and Student Achievement,” *Wisconsin School News*, December 2015.

Related Links

- Customized Leadership Services & Resources
  - Governance Consulting Services
  - Organizational Consulting Services
  - Key Work of School Boards
  - Peer Mentoring Program
- Board Assessment Tools
- Research and Data Resources
- Contact Consultants