

The School Board Role
**in Creating the Conditions
for Student Achievement**



A Review of the Research



*A report by the California School Boards Association
and its Policy and Programs Department*

The School Board Role in Creating the Conditions for Student Achievement

A Review of the Research

Contents

Introduction	2	Part II: Board-Specific Research	33
Part I. Six Factors of District Improvement	5	Section VII. The Impact of Board Relationships and Roles	34
Section I. Setting a Vision and Goals	6	Section VIII. Training and Professional Learning for Board Members	37
Section II. Systems Coherence	13	CSBA Professional Learning Opportunities	41
Section III. Using Data to Inform and Support Continuous Improvement	17	Part III: Annotated Bibliography	43
Section IV. Culture of Support	21	Endnotes	50
Section V. Investing in Human Capital by Building Staff Capacity at All Levels	27		
Section VI. Planning for Leadership Turnover Amid Ambitious Improvement Efforts	30		

CSBA Officers, 2017

Susan Henry, President

Mike Walsh, President-elect

Chris Ungar, Immediate Past President



California School Boards Association
3251 Beacon Blvd., West Sacramento, CA 95691
(800) 266-3382

5/2017

Contributors to this Report

Mary Briggs

Education Policy Analyst, Policy and Programs

Manuel Buenrostro

Education Policy Analyst, Policy and Programs

Julie Maxwell-Jolly, PhD

Senior Director, Policy and Programs

Troy Flint

Senior Director of Communications/PIO

Kerry Macklin

Graphic Design Manager, Communications



Introduction



Local, democratic governance is the cornerstone of America’s public education system—one that sets us apart from other societies.¹ The National School Boards Association declares the fundamental role of school boards is “to work with their communities to improve student achievement in their local public schools.”² Those who embrace the call to serve their communities as school district or county board members face significant opportunities and challenges .

Newly elected and veteran board members alike strive to support the achievement of all students by providing them with the educational opportunities that will promote student success. In keeping with our vision statement, the California School Boards Association (CSBA) remains committed to supporting school district and county board members’ ability to govern as “knowledgeable leaders, extraordinary governance practitioners and ardent advocates for all students.”³ This CSBA report presents a summary and synthesis of research on the board’s role in supporting districtwide improvement in student achievement.

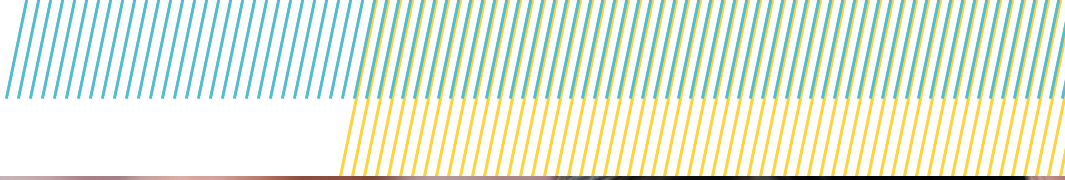
Raising student achievement and closing gaps in opportunity and access throughout a school district or county requires system-wide and meaningful improvements to instruction. Ultimately, the core aspects of teaching and learning are the interactions between the students, the teachers, and the curricular content. The impact of boards on student achievement is therefore indirect *but essential*.

How so? Put simply: The board supports improved student outcomes by creating and sustaining the conditions that support excellent—and equitable—teaching and learning. Boards play a central role in developing the educational vision for their school districts and county offices of education. Furthermore, they set the direction and help select the strategies for achieving that vision, which professionals working in the central office and at school sites are responsible for implementing.

Mary Delagardelle described this essential role in a seminal study of school boards:

The linkages between school boards and teaching and learning are often misunderstood. School boards do not directly cause student learning. However, it would appear from findings of the Lighthouse research, as well as from the work of others...that the beliefs, decisions, and actions of school boards directly impact the conditions within schools that enable district efforts to improve achievement to either succeed or fail (p. 240).⁴

Perhaps due to this indirect relationship, the existing research on the association between board governance and student achievement is scarce. Much of what does exist tends to be theoretical or offer practical “how-to” guidance rather than empirical evidence.



Put simply: The board supports improved student outcomes by creating and sustaining the conditions that support excellent—and equitable—teaching and learning.

Using District Improvement Research to Consider Governance for Student Achievement

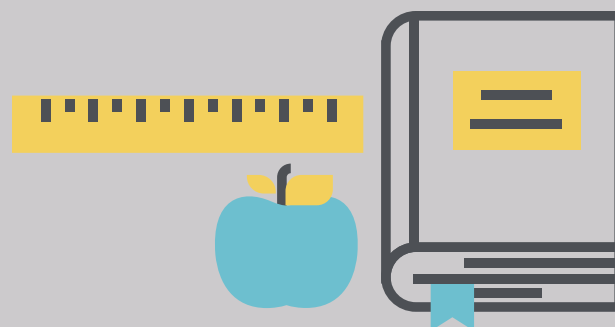
This report sheds light on how boards can carry out their essential responsibility of governance to help their school districts and county offices of education improve learning outcomes for the students in their communities. In studies of district improvement, researchers have paid limited attention to the role of school district boards and virtually none to county boards. It has focused instead on central offices and schools, including the role and impact of superintendents. Therefore, this report uses a broader lens to help board members understand how to support system-wide improvement. We begin by presenting what research has said about how school districts impact student outcomes, and then we look at the role that boards have in *supporting* that impact.

In discussions of the research in this report, we do not generally refer to county boards. Given that research on their role is virtually non-existent, they were therefore not included in the studies referenced. Nonetheless, many of the conclusions from the research on the impact of school boards on student outcomes can also have relevance for county boards.



Factors Supporting District Improvement

In our review of the research, we categorized six interdependent factors that scholars have identified as supporting districtwide improvement and have connections with school boards. The list is by no means exhaustive, but these factors appeared most often in our extensive review of the literature. We paid particular attention to what scholars had to say about school districts that have made or are making progress toward improving outcomes for historically underserved student groups.



Six Factors of District Improvement



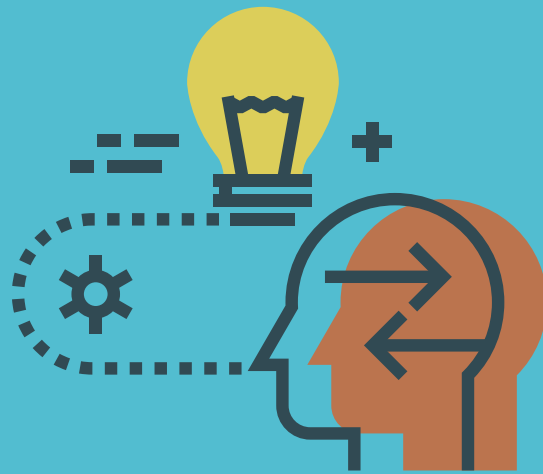
- 1** | Setting a vision and goals with a primary focus on student achievement, and aligning resources to realize those goals.
- 2** | Establishing and maintaining a balance between system-wide coherence and local (school site) autonomy.
- 3** | Using data to inform and support continuous improvement, especially for student achievement.
- 4** | Creating a district culture that supports student achievement, including establishing strong community partnerships.
- 5** | Investing in human capital by building staff capacity at all levels.
- 6** | Maintaining stable and effective leadership while ensuring a shared vision and responsibility for meeting goals that can withstand leadership transitions.

A Note on Defining High-Achieving or Highly Effective Boards

Studies that presented research on boards tended to use the terms “high achieving” or “highly effective” boards if initiatives to improve student achievement had been effectively implemented and had resulted in some level of improved student achievement. Researchers frequently examined the characteristics of these boards in comparison to those in less successful districts using qualitative or quantitative data—or a combination of both—to offer insights about effective governance.

Organization of This Report

Part I of this report examines the six factors of district improvement. Within each of these sections, we integrate relevant research that considers how school boards can have an impact in that area. Part II of this report includes two additional sections that explore school board-specific research: 1) board relationships and roles and 2) board training and professional learning. Part III features an annotated bibliography that summarizes the most salient empirical school board studies. While not a “how-to” manual on how boards can improve student achievement in their school districts or county offices of education, this report offers key lessons from research on district improvement efforts and board governance.



Part I.

Six Factors of District Improvement

Section I. Setting a Vision and Goals



Key Points in This Section:

- ❖ Districts that improve student achievement and close opportunity and achievement gaps share a vision for instruction.
- ❖ A school district's vision and goals can be used strategically to reduce distractions from the district or county's primary focus.
- ❖ Effective boards help establish the vision for district improvement in partnership with stakeholders throughout the system.
- ❖ Effective boards spend more time focusing on student achievement and policy development than on administrative details.
- ❖ To close opportunity and achievement gaps, the educational vision of a school district should incorporate a focus on equity.
- ❖ The vision and goals must be communicated consistently throughout the system.
- ❖ School district resources should be aligned with their goals.



One is hard-pressed to think of any organization that has sustained some measure of greatness in the absence of goals, values, and missions that become deeply shared throughout the organization.”

— Peter Senge⁵

Examples of high-performing districts or sustained transformation are rarely, if ever, stories about stumbling upon success. Instead, researchers have consistently found that having a “focused direction” is a necessary precondition for improvement. School districts that improve student learning throughout their systems:

1. Operate with a shared vision
2. Establish clear goals
3. Develop strategies to meet their goals
4. Align resources to help achieve their goals

Furthermore, these school districts identify ways to measure progress, a point we discuss in *Section III: Using Data to Inform and Support Continuous Improvement* on page 17.

How Does a Shared Vision Support Student Achievement?

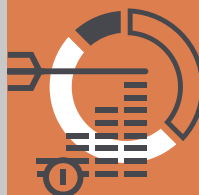
According to Jonathan Supovitz, director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education and professor at the Penn Graduate School of Education, the essential role of district leadership is “developing, communicating, and supporting a coherent vision of effective instruction.”⁷ Leaders use their vision to place the core purpose of the organization front and center while also conveying where they are heading. Without agreement, people are more likely to work in factions or advance personal agendas that divert energy and resources from the vision and goals of a few leaders at the top.⁸

Despite the indirect connection between boards and student learning outcomes, the board nonetheless plays a crucial role in supporting district improvement. Research suggested there is a relationship between student achievement and boards that share a vision and support district goals.⁹ In a review of 27 studies about the impact of leadership on student performance, J. Timothy Waters and Robert J. Marzano of McREL International, a nonprofit, non-partisan education research and development organization, found a positive correlation between student achievement and board alignment and support of district goals.¹⁰



Vision: The vision describes the overall mission of the organization and a big picture overview of what success would entail.

Example: “Our school district provides a wide range of educational opportunities—and appropriate support—so that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and career success.”



Goals: Goals provide concrete outcomes that focus attention and identify how progress will be measured.

Example: “The school district will increase the number of students successfully completing A-G requirements by 10 percent over the next three years.”



Strategies: Strategies are the specific steps organizations will take to meet their goals.

Example: “The school district will hire two additional counselors to identify and consult with students not currently on track to complete A-G coursework and connect them with resources,” or “The school district will set aside annual time for secondary teachers, counselors, special education teachers, and site administrators to collaboratively review the course placement for every student.”

Today, teachers and administrators often report that the constant churn of reform efforts in education impacts their willingness to commit to new programs or changes to practice, which makes deep, sustainable implementation unlikely.¹¹ Ideally, shared vision and goals can help board members and administrators filter initiatives and reduce distractions.¹² In the Waters and Marzano review, the authors found that when board members agree on a vision, they can prevent the district from expending energy and financial resources on a never-ending onslaught of disparate initiatives.¹³



A Vision of Effective Instruction

To improve student learning, the classroom is the essential point of change. Researchers refer to the interaction between the teacher, the student, and the content being taught as the “instructional triangle.”¹⁴ Without changes to the instructional triangle, student learning outcomes cannot improve. In light of this, school districts and schools should direct their attention to supporting effective instruction, including a general agreement about what constitutes “good” or “effective” instruction.

Collaborate to Establish a Vision and Goals

In their review of research about the relationship between district leadership and student achievement, Roberts and Marzano reported a positive, statistically significant correlation between the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in the goal-setting process and student achievement.¹⁵ In his work on district reform in Duval County, Florida, Supovitz argued that including stakeholders is necessary in vision-setting because it supports buy-in and reflects the priorities of the whole system.¹⁶ The current California Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) process recognizes the importance of such stakeholder support: it requires that districts consider feedback from stakeholders, which provides an opportunity for boards to build greater agreement and hold regular conversations about the school district’s vision and priorities.

The Importance of Communicating the Vision

Once a vision is developed in collaboration with stakeholders, it should be communicated with people throughout the system. In *The Case for District-Based Reform*, Supovitz cautioned that “if district leaders do not articulate a coherent vision of good instruction, they will cede instructional leadership either to individual schools or outside providers, or some unmanageable combination of the two.”¹⁷



When establishing a vision and goals, the board and central office should also develop intentional strategies for communicating them consistently and at all levels of the system. This has been confirmed by research on school boards in districts with high or improving achievement. In one study, the researcher compared nine districts and looked at each board’s implementation of policy initiatives, systematically dividing boards into three categories: highly successful, moderately successful, or largely unsuccessful. The study found that while low-performing boards shared values and beliefs, they did not articulate them as clearly. Moreover, the vision of unsuccessful boards did not serve as the basis for policy initiatives or inform programs and monitoring as much as in their high-performing counterparts. Additionally, the study found that successful boards engaged in a wider range of district activities. This not only led to greater board understanding about school district programs and practices, but board members’ engagement allowed them to extend the communication throughout the district and reinforce the district vision and goals more widely.¹⁸



Boards from low-achieving school districts reported focusing primarily on keeping costs low, even to the detriment of meeting academic achievement goals.

Goals for Student Achievement

Once district leaders have agreed on a shared vision, they can focus on creating specific goals. Unsurprisingly, district goals that are related to student learning outcomes have the greatest impact on student achievement.^{19,20,21,22,23,24} In one review of the research that examined the relationship between leadership and student achievement, the authors found that goal setting and planning had a positive effect on student performance. The most influential goals appeared to be those that were clear and instructionally oriented.²⁵

The first phase of the Lighthouse Study about school board effectiveness compared boards in school districts in a southern state. The researchers identified school districts with “unusually high levels” of student achievement and compared them to school districts with students of similar characteristics but substantially lower levels of performance. One of the differences they noted was that boards from low-achieving school districts reported focusing primarily on keeping costs low, even to the detriment of meeting academic achievement goals. On the other hand, boards in school districts with high achievement also considered controlling costs as important, but they repeatedly identified academic achievement as their main responsibility. This held true even in times of fiscal challenges and could be seen in decisions about spending.²⁶

In 2009, the National School Boards Association surveyed a nationally representative sample of 900 board members from 417 school districts. Boards that reported a strong academic focus were found to represent districts with slightly higher proficiency rates than in similar school districts without the same focus, and this factor was the most influential out of all the school board characteristics measured. The impact was not sizable, but it is important to remember that improvements in the instructional triangle have the greatest impact on student achievement and that while the effect of boards is important, it is indirect and difficult to measure.²⁷

Several other studies also suggest that boards in high-achieving or high-growth school districts spend more time discussing student achievement and policy development than on administrative details.^{28,29,30,31}



Vision and Goals That Emphasize Equity

Given persistent multiple achievement gaps, notably those between low-income students and their more economically advantaged peers, equity has become an increasing focus of education reform efforts. The vision of equitable outcomes for students, regardless of their socio-economic status or racial/ethnic identification, became part of federal accountability systems with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and remained in the subsequent Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. A vision that includes equitable opportunities and support for all students is associated with districts' ability to reduce subsequent achievement gaps.

Many goals cited in high-performing districts are designed to address equity. Specifically, these districts demonstrate a commitment to ensuring all students succeed by providing resources *equitably*, not necessarily equally—setting the same expectations for all students but allocating additional resources for higher need students to help them achieve at the same level as their peers. Districts that develop differentiated goals—with faster growth expected for high-needs students, coupled with investments for closing opportunity gaps to help them achieve those goals—are more likely to see closures in achievement gaps.

For example, the Lighthouse Study found that boards in high-performing districts reported different beliefs and actions from those in low-performing districts. Among this group (discussed in detail throughout this report and in the annotated bibliography), districts with higher levels of student achievement demonstrated a shared commitment to a vision about improvement. Not only did they have a vision of improving overall achievement, but their vision and subsequent goals emphasized ensuring that *all* students received a high-quality education and were shared throughout the district.³²

In another study of four school districts serving socio-economically and culturally diverse student populations, researchers found that an equity-focused vision and guiding philosophies led to concrete actions that resulted in high achievement for all students. The school districts in the study reported both high student achievement *and* reductions in achievement gaps over several consecutive years. The authors, in agreement with the Lighthouse Study, noted that boards in the successful school districts

Evidence-Based Investments

To achieve the vision and goals that governance teams set for the students in their schools, they need to invest in strategies that have demonstrated success at improving student outcomes and closing opportunity and achievement gaps. CSBA has identified eight ways an adequately funded public education could provide opportunities to ensure students graduate from high school ready for college, career, and life success. These include:

- ❖ A rigorous, well-rounded, and relevant curriculum;
- ❖ Academic support to improve achievement;
- ❖ Staff with the skills, knowledge, and competencies to promote student success;
- ❖ Early support and services;
- ❖ Family engagement, education, and assistance;
- ❖ Physical, mental, and environmental health supports;
- ❖ 21st-century technology and infrastructure; and
- ❖ Services for students with specific needs (English learners, special education students, foster youth, homeless youth, etc.).

While our current level of state funding is insufficient to fully address these factors, boards can refer to this report for ideas about how to invest their funding to meet their goals. For more information, see *Meeting California's Challenge: Access, Opportunity, and Achievement: Key Ingredients for Student Success*.

set goals and developed policies that fostered learning for *all* students. The superintendents, central office staff, principals, and community also all worked toward successful implementation of the goals based on their shared vision.³³



Broad vs. Specific Goals

An effective district vision is broad enough to allow for goals and strategies to apply to different contexts. For boards, this is the appropriate level of vision setting, allowing the school district administrators and teachers to tailor strategies and short-term goals to their particular needs. Additionally, while goals that are responsive to changes in conditions are important, the research on school district improvement suggested that boards remain mindful that significant, sustainable change takes time.^{34,35,36}

Fresno County's Sanger Unified School District is often cited as an example of sustained, dramatic turnaround. In 2004, the high-poverty school district was named as one of the lowest-performing in California. By 2011-12, all of its schools had been removed from federal Program Improvement status, and the school district as a whole exceeded the target Academic Performance Index rating of 800. By 2012, its English learners (ELs) were outperforming the state average for EL students in math and reading, as were all school district students. Notably, when researchers went to Sanger to understand how they were able to turn around performance in a relatively short period of time, they observed that the district did not develop a formal strategic plan. Instead, their reform centered on three core principles: 1) that "hope" is not a strategy—meaning that simply wishing things will improve is not sufficient and the district's *practices* must change, 2) the importance of taking professional responsibility and not "blaming" kids, and 3) that learning outcomes are the central priority.³⁷

Sanger invested in years of intensive support that focused on ongoing, incremental change, the need for evidence-based decision-making, and an emphasis on shifts in the district culture—a factor discussed in **Section IV: Culture of Support** on page 21. The emphasis on district culture focused on working to build positive relationships and respect across the district, including with the superintendent and school district staff. This positive change in culture allowed Sanger to modify practices in ways that positively impacted student success. Additionally, evidence-based decision-making was fostered by the development of achievement goals and careful monitoring of data at the district as well as the site level.³⁸

In another study of seven districts from a representative sample of its member states, the Southern Regional Education Board looked at how leaders in these school districts provided support to principals to promote the conditions necessary for improvement in secondary schools. When comparing districts they identified as minimally, moderately, or highly supportive of improvement, the researchers found a relationship between their level of support for secondary principals and their achievement data. Moreover, they identified several strategies that districts can use to support principals in facilitating school improvement. Among them were a clear and sustained focus and framework of core beliefs, identification and use of effective practices, and an ongoing focus on goals for improving student achievement. Board members in minimally supportive districts, in contrast, were primarily reactive. They paid attention to issues when someone brought problems to their attention instead of relying on a "strategic framework, mission, goals, and effective practices that hold district and school leadership responsible for owning and solving the problem."³⁹

Aligning Resources to Goals

Clear and shared goals are a necessary condition for district improvement. Goals mean little, however, if the district does not take steps to achieve them. Once board members, the superintendent, and central office staff agree upon a set of goals, a logical next step is to assess what resources—in the form of funding, time, and personnel assignment—are necessary for success.

Research on school district improvement has consistently found a link between school district resource alignment and systemic improvement. The study by the Southern Regional Education Board found that school districts that were highly supportive of principals made the most of available resources in ways that research indicates would improve student learning.⁴⁰ In addition, the Waters and Marzano review of 27 studies found a positive correlation between student achievement and school district leaders' use of resources to support goals.⁴¹

A vision for equity and related goals have implications for resource alignment as well. In a series of case studies about how urban school systems were able to improve and sustain student achievement for at least three years, the Council of the Great City Schools observed that districts funneled extra resources to the lowest-performing schools.⁴²

Importantly, board members have the ability and responsibility to make decisions that allocate resources to school district goals. The LCAP development and review process provide an opportunity for conversations about the use of funding and other resources to support the school district's vision and goals.

Conclusion

Based on the research presented in this section, one of the central functions of school board governance is the development of clear, shared goals to guide decisions within the school district. This sets the stage for successful improvement efforts. In the next section, we explore how the vision and goals developed in collaboration with staff at all levels of the system can also help boards align actions and investments of time, energy, attention, and other resources to facilitate that vision.



“ Research on school district improvement has consistently found a link between school district resource alignment and systemic improvement. ”

Section II. Systems Coherence



Key Points in This Section:

- ❖ Coherence occurs when parts of the system interact in support of its vision and goals.
- ❖ System-wide improvement requires the development of school district coherence.
- ❖ Coherence reduces fragmentation that inhibits school district improvement efforts.
- ❖ Coherence is possible in both centralized and decentralized improvement efforts.
- ❖ Sustainable improvement requires a careful balance between school district authority and site-based flexibility.

School and county boards are tasked with governance but not administration. Therefore, they can support coherence by monitoring how the different components of their system interact in service of key goals, while resisting the urge to get involved with the details of strategy implementation and management.

Many use “coherence” and “alignment” interchangeably, but there are important distinctions between the two. The previous section, for instance, refers to the importance of resource alignment, whereby leaders allocate resources in a way that reflects the school district’s vision and goals. Resource alignment is a support structure essential to school district improvement.

Researchers who study coherence, however, emphasize that it extends beyond structure. Instead, coherence can be defined as a dynamic, continual process, “which involves schools and school district central offices working together to craft or continually negotiate the fit between external demands and schools’ own goals and strategies.”⁴³ Essentially, coherence represents a connection between ideas, structures, processes, and decisions that are consistent with the school district culture and are constantly adapting to move the school district closer to meeting its goals.

A Portrait of Incoherence

Perhaps coherence is best understood by considering what it is not. Picture districts that espouse one vision and set of goals, but divert extensive resources towards a host of disconnected initiatives. School sites set their own goals and initiatives—without regard to the district priorities—that inadvertently distract from school district goals. Instead of collaborating and coordinating efforts with their colleagues and school sites, central office administrators operate in silos and send contradictory messages about what initiatives are priorities. Board members or those in the Superintendent’s Cabinet might be able to name several key goals and strategies, but teachers and community members would not be likely to do the same, much less identify connections between the daily work in schools and those goals. Key stakeholders cannot see a common thread running through the decisions at different levels of the school district. As a result, efforts become diffused and less effective, teachers feel their time is not spent effectively, and the central office is perceived as creating irrelevant “busywork” rather than supporting efforts to improve teaching and learning.

From Islands of Excellence to Coherence

American education history is littered with initiatives that never made it off the ground, failed to make significant impact, or never established roots for sustainable improvement. One reason for this is that schools and classrooms traditionally operated in isolation, a compartmentalized, semi-autonomous organization style that makes it difficult to “scale up” effective practices or develop consistent improvement. In addition, frequently, top-down reforms from the board and central office struggle to affect the critical interaction between teachers, students, and the content of the curriculum.^{44,45} To address these challenges in recent decades, educators and policy makers have shifted their strategy toward greater collaboration and an increasing focus on the district as a system of interrelated and interdependent parts, each affecting the other.



Leaders who apply systems thinking to their districts understand that what is done in one part of the system affects and has implications for every other part of the system. At the same time, they know that single changes in one area are not likely to lead to system-wide change. A partial list of the features of a district system includes hiring and teacher assignment practices, evaluation systems, professional development, facilities use, scheduling, and instructional materials purchases. In a coherent system, these components and more would complement one another, moving the whole district closer toward its goals.

When people discuss the challenges facing American education, they are often quick to acknowledge that many students attend excellent public schools. Being able to name individual teachers or schools that provide an engaging, intellectually demanding curriculum that results in student achievement, however, is not sufficient. As researchers from the Harvard Public Education Leadership Project wrote:

All districts can point to a small number of schools that effectively serve low-income students, but these are often islands of excellence; there is little evidence that the success of those schools can easily be scaled up. Thus, the most important and motivating mission for the leaders of large, urban districts is to effectively serve all students so that they have equal opportunities and achieve consistent success.⁴⁶

While the project at Harvard focused on large, urban school districts, the mission of education leaders to improve student achievement, regardless of school district size or location, is the same. The challenges facing small, rural, or suburban districts may differ, but the concept is applicable, no matter the context. If the function of a school district is to support effective teaching and learning for all students, then the school district should be organized to support a coherent system of services that facilitate excellent teaching and learning in every school and classroom.

Fragmentation

School districts and county offices of education typically do not lack sufficient goals. As Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn noted, the problem is “the presence of too many [goals] that are ad hoc, unconnected, and ever changing.”⁴⁷ Too many goals might not seem to be a threat to improvement, but layering goals on top of goals can have significant consequences. The work to meet a long list of goals inhibits depth of implementation. Additionally, Fullan and Quinn cautioned that:

*Even when the goals are the right ones, they may not be experienced as connected ideas by the users. People see them as discrete demands with little or no connection to each other or their daily work; scrambling to implement too many directions and lacking a coherent sense of how they connect results in paralysis and frustration.*⁴⁸

This “initiative fatigue” not only places current improvement efforts at risk of failure, it also makes it more difficult for the successful launch of future projects. School district and county boards can guide administrators at both the central office and school level to filter new ideas. Supovitz calls school districts “wonderlands of distraction” and advises leaders such as board members to use their vision and goals to exercise discipline in resisting new initiatives that are not expressly mandated.⁴⁹

The Balance Between School District Authority and Flexibility at the Site Level

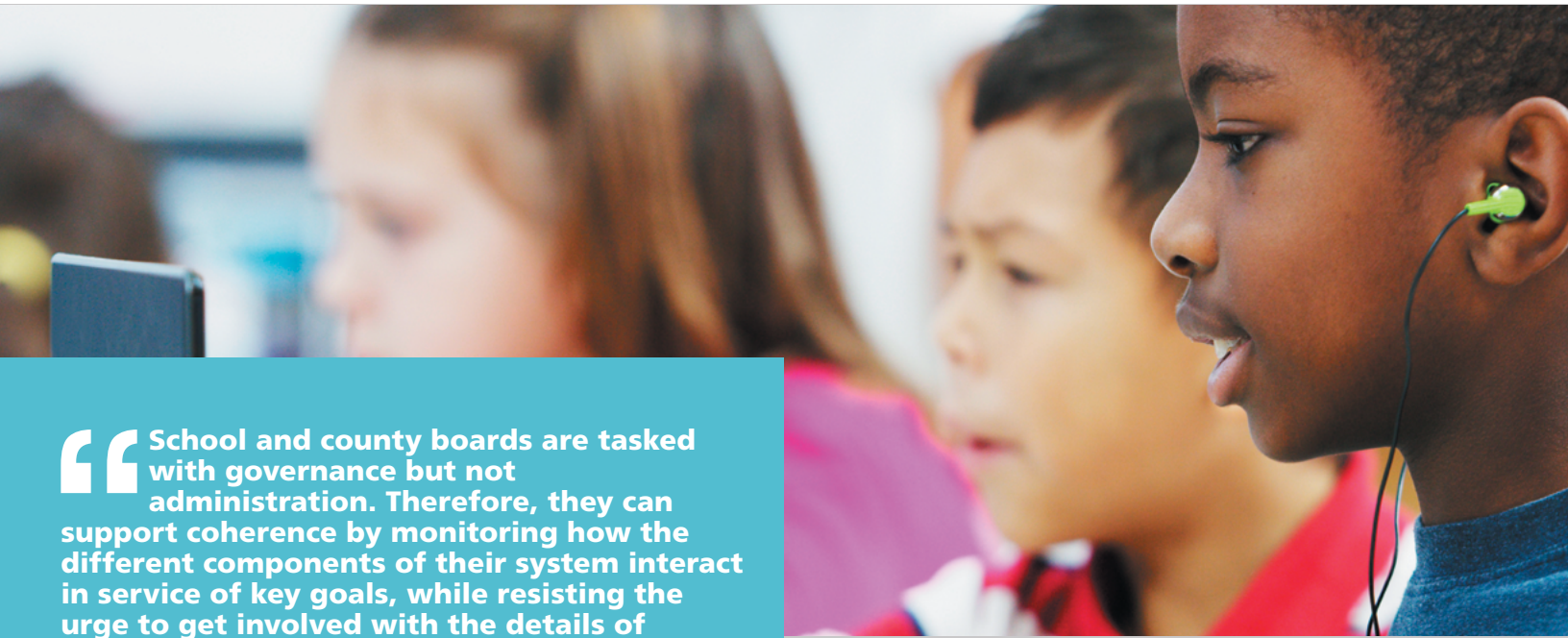
Those who have experienced school district reform efforts in the past two decades might recall that in some school districts, the call for systemic improvement was interpreted as a call for standardization. For some, the pendulum swung from a semi-autonomous district organization with a combination of site- and district-level decision making to one that centralized nearly all curricular decisions. In those places, teachers throughout the school or district might have been expected to be on the same page—literally—on the same day. Over time, however, school district leaders began to understand that instructional coherence is not synonymous with “standardized” or “uniform” teaching.

Centralization vs. Decentralization

Many school district reform efforts tend to fall into two categories: increased or decreased centralization. A recent Harvard study suggested that coherence is possible, regardless of the approach selected. The study looked at five large, urban school districts in different states. Three districts were more centralized and two had recently moved to decentralize in favor of more local control. The researchers found that school district improvement was not tied to the level of centralization. Instead, the most important factor was the ability of the school districts to effectively implement the strategies they selected—in other words, their organizational capacity for supporting instruction.⁵⁰ This is discussed further in **Section V: Investing in Human Capital by Building Staff Capacity at All Levels** on page 27.

The research on school district improvement consistently points to an approach that balances school district authority with flexibility at the site level.^{51,52,53,54} What works in one context might not be effective in another, so schools and teachers need the flexibility to adapt to the needs of their students. Most educators can recall hearing about an initiative that led to major gains in student achievement, yet they were disappointed when their school district or school attempted to adopt the reform and the results were not nearly as positive.

Moreover, administrators and teachers can draw on a wealth of experience and knowledge about how to adapt efforts for their school community. If the vision and goals are shared, the research confirms that school districts can develop coherence without requiring that school sites move in lockstep.⁵⁵ The school district’s role is to establish a shared vision and goals and measure progress toward meeting those goals, while schools take responsibility for student learning outcomes. *How* schools meet district goals, however, can be given some flexibility to allow for professional judgment and the school



“ School and county boards are tasked with governance but not administration. Therefore, they can support coherence by monitoring how the different components of their system interact in service of key goals, while resisting the urge to get involved with the details of strategy implementation and management.”

context. Yes, the district might identify a few key strategies, such as a coaching model or setting aside blocks of time for specific instructional programs, but demanding rigid conformity can backfire and affect district morale, culture, and student achievement.^{56,57,58}

Boards have considerable influence over the school district’s approach to developing coherence. In the Lighthouse Study, for example, high-achieving school districts demonstrated a balance between a clear, districtwide direction and site-level autonomy, especially when compared to low-achieving school districts serving similar students. In part, the use of data and other information helped sites identify their needs so they could effectively tailor strategies toward meeting school district goals.⁵⁹ Likewise, the study by the Southern Regional Education Board found that effective strategies for supporting principals in school improvement efforts included the development of instructional coherence and support for that instruction at the school level. The boards and central offices in the most supportive districts were organized to support each school by using data, rather than selecting one-size-fits-all strategies.⁶⁰ This point is further discussed in *Section III: Using Data to Inform and Support Continuous Improvement* on page 17.

Perhaps one of the more surprising findings comes from the Waters and Marzano review of 27 studies, which found a negative relationship between site-level autonomy and student achievement, i.e., that student achievement was lower in districts that had greater site-level autonomy. The authors interpreted the findings to mean that site-level autonomy needs certain parameters for success. They posited that there is a benefit to what they call *defined autonomy*—that is, the goals themselves are non-negotiable and strongly emphasized—but school leaders, including teachers, are allowed to determine the approach they use to achieve those goals.⁶¹ As part of this system, school district leaders must monitor schools’ progress and intervene if necessary.

Conclusion

Research supports the importance of coherence to achieving a district’s vision and goals for student achievement. Coherence does not require that individual schools give up their autonomy. Instead, coherence provides guidance for how sites can be responsive to local conditions in a way that is consistent with school district priorities for achieving student gains. Boards can play a critical role in fostering coherent school district or county office of education actions and initiatives in order to stay focused on their essential goals and vision for student achievement.

Section III. Using Data to Inform and Support Continuous Improvement



Key Points in This Section:

- ❖ School district leadership has an important role in promoting data use by staff at all levels.
- ❖ It is essential that school district leaders support data use at the school level.
- ❖ Data is needed to understand achievement and opportunity gaps and inform equitable resource use.
- ❖ Data from multiple sources is necessary to equitably address student needs.

Once a school district or county office of education has set its goals and vision, it must gather data to measure progress and, when necessary, adjust its course. Leaders at both the school district and school level need reliable data to inform ongoing decisions about how to improve student outcomes and facilitate continuous improvement. In this section, we will focus on:

1. How school district leadership, including board members, use data to inform resource allocation (financial, staff, time, etc.), measure progress toward goals, and communicate with stakeholders.
2. How school staff use data to inform teaching, learning, and distribution of student-support resources at the site level.

When considering data use, however, there is a difference between the *potential* of student-learning data to inform—and ultimately improve—instruction and how data is *actually* used within schools and districts. Effective data use depends on the capacity of those using the data, and research has repeatedly found that educators struggle to both interpret data and use data to alter instruction.⁶² In this section, we address how board members can support more effective data use in informing decisions for continuous improvement.





“When students, parents, educators, and partners have the right information to make decisions, students excel.”

School District Leadership Use of Data

A culture of continuous improvement in which data informs decisions starts with the support and example of school district leaders, including the board, superintendent, and central office staff. Data should help the district or county become a learning organization that uses reliable information to develop goals and strategies and measures progress toward meeting them, with an emphasis on improving practices and internal accountability. School district leadership can support the use of data for continuous improvement by: 1) using data at the central office level to monitor how investments of fiscal and human resources contribute to meeting school district goals and 2) supporting conditions for effective data use at the school level.

There is substantial evidence that—with support—the use of data to assess district programs and monitor goals can improve student outcomes. A meta-analysis of 70 studies on the relationship between school leadership and student achievement found, among other things, that student achievement is significantly correlated with district leaders’ support for monitoring progress toward goals and the strategic use of resources aligned with those goals.⁶³ Sanger Unified School

District provides one example of the power of effective data use. Sanger has seen significant growth in student achievement over the last decade, including the narrowing of previously persistent gaps districtwide. In one study of how they were able to achieve such gains, researchers identified decisions grounded in evidence as one of the three principles for district improvement. This included looking closely at different types of data, using data as feedback to test and improve approaches, and using evidence to gain support from the community.⁶⁴

The research on district data use has implications for governance teams. While much data use unfolds at the central office and site level, boards play an essential role in district efforts to use data. Board support includes: 1) making data use a priority; 2) investing in data management systems; 3) allocating resources toward support staff and other human and financial resources for data use; 4) providing money and time to improve the staff’s capacity to use data effectively; and 5) fostering a culture of using data for continuous improvement, not compliance.

Use of Data at School Sites

Schools themselves benefit from site-level data analysis, interpretation, and response by administrators and teachers. Thus, board members and superintendents are key to ensuring that schools have the appropriate infrastructure, guidance, and training to use data effectively. A 2010 US Department of Education national survey of 427 school districts on the use of education data found that the most common strategies for building school capacity are professional development, providing staff for data system set up and support, and developing tools for generating and acting on data. While the report cites that 90 percent of school districts surveyed provided at least some school staff with training on using data to improve instruction, in many cases, training had not been extended to all schools.³⁹ Moreover, according to a nationally representative survey of district leaders conducted in 2010, almost all superintendents (95 percent) and three fourths of board members surveyed reported that they regarded the frequent use of assessment data as an important instructional strategy (flagging data as extremely or very important).⁶⁶

Leaders can support principals by offering them professional development to understand and use data—an essential strategy for continuous improvement in schools. The study by the Southern Regional Education Board, which looked at how leaders in seven school districts supported principals, found that providing principals with high-quality data that linked student achievement to school and classroom practices and assisting schools in using the data, were critical strategies for improving student outcomes.⁶⁷ School district leaders can also encourage principals to use data through policies. For example, according to the 2010 US Department of Education report, 69 percent of school districts reported requiring all or some of their schools to follow data-driven decision-making practices in formulating their school improvement plans.⁶⁸

Principals also influence how teachers use data. First, they can encourage teachers to use data by designing and implementing regular data examination activities. Second, they should establish a climate of trust and mutual respect in which data is used as a resource for learning and improving practice, not as a blunt instrument to punish or shame educators. Furthermore, principals set an example through their own use of data to inform decisions and by sharing pertinent data with staff.

Research has indicated that, in general, teachers have positive views about the use of data as a resource for instructional



“ School district leaders can improve student outcomes by using data to assess the effectiveness of programs, monitor progress toward goals, and ensure that schools are supported to use data strategically.”

decisions. Teachers who participated in a 2015 nationally representative survey of more than 4,600 teachers conducted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation indicated that teachers use data both to understand student progress and to tailor instruction to students’ learning needs. More than three fourths of the teachers surveyed (78 percent) said they believe that data can help them understand students’ grasp of the subject matter and where they should focus instruction.⁶⁹ These results mesh well with the findings of another 2015 survey of over 1,000 teachers and administrators that found that over three fourths of teachers surveyed use data to track student performance, over two thirds to improve instruction, and over two thirds to identify instructional needs.⁷⁰

Given that teachers are the most important in-school factor contributing to student achievement, teachers’ use of data can have the greatest impact on student outcomes.⁷¹ The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation survey, however, found that despite their belief in the value of

data use, 67 percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that they are not satisfied with the quality of data and tools for data use that are available to them on a regular basis.⁷² Therefore, school boards should establish a school district priority to support making relevant and timely data available to teachers while providing educators the flexibility to adapt lessons and curriculum in response to student, classroom, and school learning needs identified through data analysis and interpretation.⁷³

Board members can also ensure that the central office provides support for teachers and principals to use data effectively by investing in professional development and in data support staff to build school-site capacity. In a diverse state like California, support for data use will vary for different school districts. Large school districts may have different resources available than small, rural ones, whether in terms of data management systems or personnel. Board members and superintendents will need to consider the capacity constraints of their school district or county office of education when determining how to best support data use in their schools.

Data Use to Support Equity

A critical use of data is to improve educational equity and help schools recognize and close opportunity and achievement gaps. Equity is based on the concept that all students should receive the opportunities and supports that they need to achieve and that some students and schools will require more resources. Data analysis with a focus on equity can help school district leaders identify and measure achievement gaps, examine existing opportunity gaps that might be contributing to lower achievement for some students and student groups, and determine which resources can be used to close these gaps. Data can also help school district leaders communicate to parents and other stakeholders about how and why resources are being used to address challenges uncovered through data analysis.

Within classrooms, using data for equity also means looking at multiple factors to address individual student needs. As described in a chapter in *Data-Driven School Improvement*,

*Data use includes ... a variety of data that may be collected on a child: formal assessments; writing samples over time; local assessments; learning history; family, demographic, and special program information; psychological measures; extra-curricular participation; and many more items.*⁷⁴



The effectiveness of using a wide range of data in efforts to close achievement gaps is supported by evidence from a survey by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. This analysis of 32 K-8 public schools in the Northern California Bay Area revealed that teachers in schools narrowing achievement gaps are more likely to receive professional development on understanding data and linking it to instructional strategies, and to apply what they learn by using data to assess and address the gaps of low-achieving students. These teachers also had leaders that encouraged them to use data to understand gaps and to collaborate with other teachers by analyzing student data together and observing each other's instructional strategies to address needs identified by the data.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Effective use of data and a culture of continuous improvement starts with board support in setting direction and investing resources. One important investment is in support for building the capacity of staff at different levels to understand and use data, including that of the board and superintendent. School district leaders can improve student outcomes by using data to assess the effectiveness of programs and monitor progress toward goals, and ensure that schools are supported to use data strategically. A districtwide strategy of data use means that principals and teachers receive support in using data effectively. At the school level, data use starts with principals who set the tone for a culture of continuous improvement and teachers who use multiple sources of student data to improve instruction. Moreover, data has a role in equity by shedding light on opportunity and achievement gaps and keeping school leaders, principals, and teachers focused on providing learning opportunities according to students' needs.

Section IV. Culture of Support



Key Points in This Section:

- ❖ School district culture is an essential, often overlooked factor in improvement initiatives.
- ❖ School district improvement is supported by a culture that reinforces a commitment to the beliefs that all children can learn, a collective responsibility for student learning, and a recognition that while external factors are important influences on achievement, schools *can* affect change.
- ❖ A culture of trust is a necessary condition for school district improvement, and the lack of trust impedes improvement.
- ❖ Community engagement and partnerships are essential to the success and sustainability of improvement initiatives.

The Importance of School District Culture

All the factors explored in earlier sections of this report—goals, coherence, and data use—provide essential supports for school improvement, but there is another factor that effective education leaders intuitively understand is important: school district culture. Yet, understanding what constitutes an organization’s culture can be difficult to explain. In the simplest terms, culture could be described as “the way we do things here.” School district culture consists of the predominant norms, values, and attitudes that define and drive behavior in the district.⁷⁶

No one, including the board, can dictate the district’s culture, but there are ways that boards can model, and make explicit, values and expectations for professional behavior that support a culture that fosters effective teaching and learning. Moreover, board members can work with central office administrators to develop the school district’s desired culture through developing policies about collaboration and professional learning.

The research on Sanger Unified School District’s dramatic improvement in student achievement since 2004 refers to a transformation of school district culture from one of “isolation and protected turf” to one of collaboration, shared responsibility, and continuous improvement.⁷⁷ Additionally, their efforts were built on a philosophy captured in three slogans that were consistently used to communicate the values and beliefs—the culture—leaders were working to create: “Hope is not a strategy,” “Don’t blame the kids,” and “It’s all about student learning.”⁷⁸

In a recent collaboration between Harvard’s Business School and Graduate School of Education, the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) partnered with eight urban school districts to develop the management and leadership practices of public education leaders. From that project, a research team ultimately studied five large, urban school districts as they were attempting to create system-wide improvement. The study examined how the school districts’ organizational elements either reinforced or detracted from their improvement strategies. The research team identified several factors associated with school district improvement, but they noted that two related factors stood out as needing more careful attention:

Two elements of the [project’s] Coherence Framework – the environment and culture – were critical but often overlooked aspects of the central office–schools relationships... The organizational culture of a district could be a barrier to or an enabler of efforts to improve performance.⁷⁹

In our review of the research on the relationship between school district culture and system-wide improvement, including factors related to school boards, we identified three central themes: 1) relationships of trust; 2) attitudes and beliefs that foster rather than hinder improvement; and 3) community engagement that includes developing partnerships with outside agencies or organizations. We explore each of these elements below.

The Importance of Trust

Change that fundamentally alters instruction and improves learning outcomes requires commitment, and an extensive and growing body of research makes it clear that successful implementation cannot happen without trust.^{80,81,82} This research typically focuses on trust at several levels: trust between the central office or superintendent and school sites, trust between principals and their staff, peer-to-peer trust, and trust in parent–school relationships.

Despite the limited research available with a specific focus on school boards and the importance of trust, research on relationships of trust within a school district supported a logical assumption that if board members attend to the behaviors and expressed values that change or reinforce the school district’s culture, they can improve conditions



for effective teaching and learning. Among them, board members can support a culture of trust in several ways:

- 1. Engaging with the community:** As discussed in greater detail on page 24, collaboration with members of all levels of the system helps strengthen community ties and builds trust with community members.
- 2. Fostering mutual accountability for implementation:** When boards include educators and administrators in the development of initiatives, set realistic timelines, and provide necessary resources, administrators and school staff are more likely to develop confidence that they will receive the resources to ensure that their efforts will succeed.
- 3. Modeling positive and professional relationships:** Boards set the tone for school district interactions.
- 4. Making decisions with transparency:** When possible, boards can foster trust by communicating about the decision-making process in an open and transparent way.

Additionally, trust significantly impacts teachers’ willingness to become more open about their instructional practices and student data. The idealized view of data-driven decision making is that educators will sit together, pore over student data, reflect, and make changes that lead to more effective teaching. A growing body of research on data use in schools, however, finds that for data use to be effective, a culture of inquiry is critical. For data to be a tool for learning, it must be approached as a resource, not a blunt instrument that focuses primarily on what teachers are not doing well.^{83,84,85,86,87} Boards can influence this culture from the top by working with the superintendent and administrators to encourage data use as a tool by which teachers can learn. Otherwise, data use practices might result in teachers who are disengaged or that focus more on how to move the numbers instead of changing instruction.



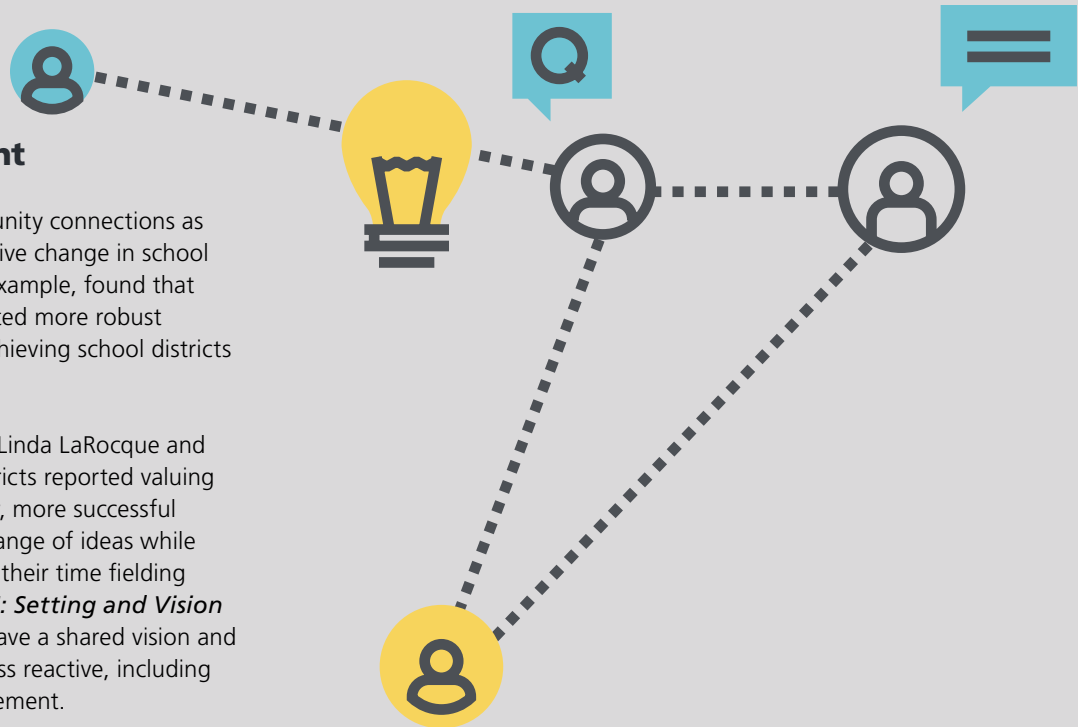
“ Researchers described the strength of community connections as one of the preconditions for productive change in school districts.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Attitudes and beliefs shape organizational culture, and that culture influences behavior. School district culture is strongly influenced by the attitudes and beliefs about teaching, learning, students, families, collaboration, and more that are espoused and encouraged by the district.

Researchers who study school district improvement have repeatedly found several beliefs that are associated with improved teaching and learning, especially for students who have traditionally been underserved in schools. Although the list is not exhaustive, we highlight three beliefs and attitudes that appear throughout school district and school improvement literature. Boards that consistently nurture these attitudes and beliefs at all levels of the system create essential conditions that are known to contribute to student improvement.

- ❖ **All students can learn.** The Lighthouse Study found that boards in high-achieving school districts reported significantly more positive opinions about their students’ potential than in low-achieving districts. This is notable, given that the study looked at school districts with similar student characteristics. Therefore, favorable or unfavorable views of students’ potential were not the result of differences among the districts in terms of students’ cultural, socio-economic, or linguistic backgrounds.⁸⁸ Beliefs about the ability of all students to learn is important because, if those in the district operate on the belief that every child has the capacity for achievement, they are more likely to consider it their responsibility to help students meet their potential.
- ❖ **Teachers and schools can make a difference.** External factors play a significant role in student achievement, yet schools are far from powerless in effecting positive change. When compared to lower-achieving districts serving similar students, the authors of the Lighthouse Study noted that school boards in higher-achieving districts reported greater belief in their staff’s capacity for improving student achievement. On the other hand, lower-achieving boards were more likely to deflect responsibility. Not only did they blame external factors, but they also were more likely to blame the students.⁸⁹ A National School Boards Association report that examined the features of effective boards found that those boards shared a belief in their school districts’ ability to teach all children at high levels, while less effective boards reported this belief significantly less.⁹⁰
- ❖ **Collective responsibility for student learning.** Another finding from the first phase of the Lighthouse Study was that school districts with higher levels of student achievement described a shared purpose about educating all students.⁹¹ In a review of studies that explored how some school districts are able to improve achievement, especially those with high concentrations of poverty, a common finding was that educators from successful districts “owned” their contributions to improve student learning. Additionally, they received the support to help them succeed—from boards, superintendents, the central office, principals, and others.⁹²



Community Engagement

Researchers described strong community connections as one of the preconditions for productive change in school districts. The Lighthouse Study, for example, found that high-achieving school districts reported more robust community connections than low-achieving school districts with similar student characteristics.⁹³

In a study of nine school districts by Linda LaRocque and Peter Coleman, the boards in all districts reported valuing community responsiveness. However, more successful boards demonstrated a greater exchange of ideas while less successful boards spent more of their time fielding concerns.⁹⁴ As discussed in **Section I: Setting and Vision and Goals** on page 6, boards that have a shared vision and goals can be more intentional and less reactive, including when it comes to community engagement.

In the series of case studies by the Council of the Great City Schools, the researchers identified four urban school districts reporting at least three years of student achievement gains, achievement that outpaced that of school districts within their states, and some success at narrowing test score gaps between their white and non-white students. The researchers identified several conditions that laid the groundwork for positive change, including the school district’s ability to communicate with city and district stakeholders and effectively engage their support for the school district’s vision and efforts. The authors concluded that reforms become more successful—and *sustainable*—when the school and the broader community provide continual feedback and support.⁹⁵

When the board and administrators welcome collaborative development of vision and goals, they foster a culture that strengthens the school district’s capacity to improve. The study by the Southern Regional Education Board, for example, identified several strategies that school districts can use to support principals to improve secondary school achievement. Among the strategies they noted were “open, credible processes to involve key school and community leaders in shaping a vision for improving schools.”⁹⁶ This is consistent with results from the Waters and Marzano review of 27 studies, which found that collaborative goal setting is positively associated with student achievement.⁹⁷

Overall, this research suggests that school district leaders’ investments in community engagement are essential for success, especially when it comes to major initiatives to improve student achievement, and that boards play a central role in fostering this community engagement. When big reforms are developed and implemented without securing community agreement and support, school districts are likely to experience substantial resistance that could effectively stop improvement efforts in their tracks and erode community trust.⁹⁸

Community engagement, however, requires ongoing attention and support. A recent report from Policy Analysis for Education (PACE) addressed the promise, challenges, and current implementation of the community engagement component of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). LCFF prioritizes significant community involvement in educational decision-making to develop the district’s LCAPs.⁹⁹ However, during the first three years of LCFF implementation (2013-16), a study by the Public Policy Institute of California found that despite enthusiasm and willingness to collaborate with community members such as families, “statewide, districts are struggling with how to meaningfully engage stakeholders as part of on-going transparency, two-way communication, and inclusive decision-making.”¹⁰⁰

External Partnerships

In addition to partnering with community members, school districts can support improvement by partnering with external groups. In his book *The Case for District-Based Reform*, Supovitz observed, “Schools and districts can be relatively insular organizations, and external providers bring fresh perspectives and different formulations into them, thereby infusing them with new ideas and practices.”¹⁰² He also pointed out that developing and updating more effective instructional materials can be a worthwhile investment of time and resources. While locally developed resources can be high quality and come with easier buy-in, working with external providers can be more cost effective and lead to greater improvement in the long run.¹⁰³

Boards can play a critical role in developing and managing external partnerships that facilitate improved student achievement. School districts contending with a complex array of internal and external pressures can strengthen their capacity by seeking technical and financial support from outside, whether for professional development, connections with the business community to strengthen career readiness efforts, or partnerships with universities to launch or evaluate initiatives.

At the board level, members can identify areas where local capacity can be supported through external partnerships. For example, a study of the effectiveness of boards at implementing and sustaining local initiatives in 39 school districts found that board members from high-performing school districts reported spending more time with government and community agencies to improve district capacity for raising student achievement.¹⁰⁴ This confirms findings from earlier research reviews noting that one of the more frequently cited characteristics of effective boards is positive relationships with external agencies, local and state government, and the general public.^{105,106}

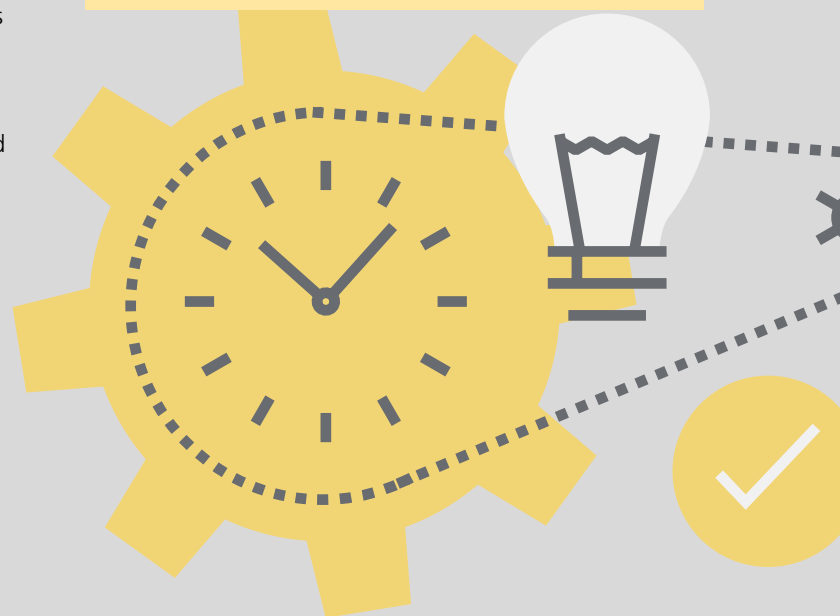
School districts have the capacity to provide many instructional supports to their school sites, and many of them can be supported in partnership with external organizations. Three critical service tasks well-suited for partnerships include:

1. Developing instructional materials for schools;
2. Providing professional development; and
3. Gathering and organizing data that teachers, school administrators, and school district leaders can use to make decisions.¹⁰⁷

“The Pomona Promise” Partnership

Pomona Unified School District has invested in partnerships with a wide array of stakeholders. The Pomona Promise project was started in 2004 as a community effort to address local violence. It has been an integral part of the development of the district’s *Promise of Excellence: Strategic Plan 2015-2020*. The district’s plan was constructed as part of a collaborative model that includes more than 26 formal partnerships and additional informal connections. Examples of their partnerships include:

- ❖ Linkages to local universities, including the Online to College program for grades 5-12;
- ❖ Public–private partnerships for career development, including tutoring, mentoring, and local career days; and
- ❖ Collaboration with other Pomona Promise members to improve safety, health, transportation, and economic development within the broader community.¹⁰¹





“ Schools and districts can be relatively insular organizations, and external providers bring fresh perspectives and different formulations into them, thereby infusing them with new ideas and practices.”¹⁰²

Supovitz 2006, p.213

Board members can help determine when external partners might be preferable, given the district’s current capacity and priorities. Research suggested that, in many cases, external providers can offer additional instructional expertise at lower cost, but there are challenges in ensuring that the partnerships develop deep roots and sustainable improvement.¹⁰⁸ One consideration to take into account is that when external partnerships are developed, central offices and school sites tend to assume that the work is the primary responsibility of the consultants or other partners. However, governance teams can reduce the risks of disjointed or unsustainable initiatives by attending carefully to local strategies and plans that support effective implementation.

A 2017 Education Trust-West report provided several examples of how districts can build external partnerships to support student learning. Researchers studied six California school districts serving high concentrations of low-income and English learner students that obtained above-average scores on their 2015-16 California Science Test and found that one factor that contributed to their success was district partnerships with science institutions.¹⁰⁹ The report described a 2014 external evaluation of the BaySci Program, which found that a partnership between eight Bay Area districts, the Lawrence Hall of Science, Inverness Research, and the Exploratorium



led to increases in the quality and amount of science instruction, as well as student engagement. Teachers also reported that students improved their ability to express their ideas verbally and in writing because of the project.¹¹⁰ The Education Trust-West report found that school districts without access to nearby science institutions were able to build external partnerships through other networks. The report, therefore, recommends that school districts develop external partnerships to provide professional development for teachers and access to curriculum content that supports more effective science education, especially for students who are English learners.¹¹¹

Section V. Investing in Human Capital by Building Staff Capacity at All Levels



Key Points in This Section:

- ❖ School district leaders, including board members, play an important role in developing the capacity of staff at all levels.
- ❖ School staff capacity is critical to efforts to foster site-level autonomy.
- ❖ Building the capacity of teachers is important to directly improving student outcomes.
- ❖ Principals are central to efforts to develop the capacity of all school-based staff.

Research indicates that investing in human capital by building staff capacity—including that of district leaders—is a necessary element of school district improvement. School districts and the schools within them are dependent on staff to provide and support quality educational programs that meet the learning needs of all students. Furthermore, as school districts seek to improve student achievement through new initiatives, outcomes are dependent on highly skilled staff.

School District Leadership Support of Staff Capacity

Evidence indicates that school districts that prioritize and invest in professional development can achieve improvements in student outcomes. As framed by Supovitz in *The Case for District-Based Reform*, “creating an effective professional development system that builds the capacity of people at all levels of the system is the second great challenge for district leaders.”¹¹² This includes training for teachers, school leaders, and school district leaders to support the end goal of improving teaching and learning for all students. Furthermore, according to the 2010 nationally representative survey by the National School Boards Association, the Iowa School Boards Foundation, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, board members and superintendents identified professional development as the most important approach to improving student learning.¹¹³

Board members provide critical support for school district efforts to build staff capacity. In the school districts with higher levels of student achievement identified by the Lighthouse Study, for example, a focus on providing workplace support and professional development were highlighted as essential conditions for success. The study found that in the higher-achieving districts, support centered on helping staff develop their skills for improving student learning through collective study, small group teams, shared and individual accountability for outcomes, and by believing in students’ ability to succeed.¹¹⁴ Additionally, in the study of the effectiveness of boards at implementing and sustaining

local initiatives in 39 school districts, the authors found that successful boards invested in extensive professional development, even in tough budget times.¹¹⁵

Building board member capacity is an important consideration as well. Training can make board members stronger supporters of professional development efforts in their districts. For example, in the second phase of the Lighthouse Study, researchers found that professional development for board members strengthened their beliefs in areas that made them more likely to prioritize support for professional development in their school districts. These beliefs included that adults can have a positive impact on student achievement and that professional learning is essential to improving teaching and learning.¹¹⁶ For more information on the importance of training and professional learning for board members, see *Section VIII: Training and Professional Learning for Board Members* on page 37.

The Importance of Staff Capacity to School-Site Autonomy

Building staff capacity at the school level is tied to the concepts explored in *Section II: Coherence* on page 13, that is, “establishing and maintaining a balance between system-wide coherence and local (school site) autonomy.” That section references the challenges of the superintendent and board to provide adequate districtwide guidance to schools, while also allowing for sufficient site-level flexibility. While site-level autonomy is necessary to a well-functioning school system, staff need the appropriate training and support that will allow them to realize the vision and goals established by the school district leadership team. Two types of school-level staff are critical to improving student achievement—teachers and principals.

Teacher Capacity

Building teacher capacity is an essential strategy for improving student achievement. Research has shown that teachers are the most important in-school contributors to student achievement.¹¹⁸ Additionally, the impact of quality teachers goes beyond academic achievement. One study found that students of effective teachers are more likely to attend college, attend higher ranked colleges, earn higher salaries, live in better neighborhoods, and have lower rates of teen pregnancy.¹¹⁹ While not all aspects of what makes a good teacher may be quantifiable, research does tell us that the quality of teachers’ subject matter content and pedagogical understanding have an impact on student learning. In addition, there

Impact of the Teacher Shortage

The teacher shortage is a critical issue that has a direct impact on the ability of school districts and county offices of education to place highly skilled teachers in every classroom. According to a 2016 report by the Learning Policy Institute and CSBA, 75 percent of the 211 participating California school districts reported experiencing teacher shortages. Moreover, the largest shortages were in the areas of special education, mathematics, and science—subject areas of consistent shortage throughout the years. This signals that initiatives to better recruit and retain highly skilled teachers need to be at the front and center of any effort to build teacher capacity.¹¹⁷

is evidence that, on average, students of teachers who have several years of classroom experience outperform students taught by beginning instructors.¹²⁰

Teachers are also an essential component of the instructional triangle (composed of teachers, students, and the curriculum). Highly trained teachers master both the curriculum they teach and strategies for instruction of that curriculum in order to improve student learning. In a 2010 analysis of how Chicago Public Schools organized to improve student outcomes, the author commented, “It is inconceivable to us that major improvements in student learning can occur without fundamental changes in the way that students interact with teachers around subject matter.”¹²¹ In another analysis of teacher professional development, several practices were cited as gap reducing; these included training focused on the implementation of a rigorous curriculum, differentiation for diverse students, using assessment data, and collaboration.⁹⁶ The importance of collaboration has been supported by other research as well—for example, a study of over 9,000 teachers in 336 Miami-Dade County public schools found that teachers and schools that engage in high-quality collaboration saw bigger student gains in math and reading. Moreover, high-quality collaboration has been shown to help teachers improve their instructional skills faster than those who do not engage in it.¹²³



As highlighted in the following section on principal capacity, research further indicated that district leaders, including board members, play an important role in investing resources toward teacher professional development and in ensuring that educators are supported by staff at all levels.

Principal Capacity

Principals have a strong impact on the support provided to teachers and in how instructional time is invested for the benefit of students. As noted in the study of Chicago Public Schools, “These school leaders build agency for change at the community level, nurture the leadership of others through a shared vision for local reform, and provide the necessary guidance over time to sustain a coherent program of schoolwide development.”¹²⁴ In addition, a meta-analysis of 70 studies on the relationship between school leadership and student achievement found that principal leadership was correlated with student achievement and that there were strong links between specific principal behaviors and student learning, including understanding what to do to improve teaching and learning, and “knowing when, how, and why to do it.”¹²⁵ Principals also help to set the conditions that attract and retain highly skilled teachers. For example, a 2010 survey of 40,000 teachers identified supportive leadership as the main factor influencing teacher retention.¹²⁶ Other studies from North Carolina,¹²⁷ Massachusetts,¹²⁸ and Maryland¹²⁹ found similar results with regard to the impact of principal leadership on the working conditions that keep teachers from leaving their school, school district, or the field.

The important role of principals in creating conditions that lead to teacher retention and other conditions that support student achievement indicate that efforts to improve principal capacity are worthwhile. Research supports the idea that school boards can

play an important role in supporting these efforts. According to a study by the Southern Regional Education Board, there are several ways in which school districts support principals that lead to school improvement—some with direct implications for school boards. Boards can work with school district leaders to provide guidance for districtwide instructional coherence and invest heavily in instruction-related professional learning for principals, teacher leaders, and school district staff. The study also found that principals feel better supported when their boards and superintendents share a common framework, mission, goals, and values that enable them to work together to support site staff as they carry out the school district vision to improve student achievement.¹³⁰

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this section makes it clear that school district improvement is supported by comprehensive professional development that builds capacity for staff at all levels. Furthermore, site-level autonomy cannot work unless the capacity of teachers and principals is developed. Teachers are the most important in-school factor contributing to student achievement, while principals set the conditions for all school-based staff to strive to improve student achievement. Research also confirms that district leadership, including that of school boards, is essential to providing ongoing support for professional development. Boards can work with the superintendent to set an ongoing goal of developing staff capacity at all levels and allocate resources to support that goal, even in times of economic downturn.

Section VI. Planning for Leadership Turnover Amid Ambitious Improvement Efforts

Key Points in This Section

- ❖ School district leadership turnover is inevitable and can challenge the momentum and sustainability of district improvement efforts.
- ❖ Boards can increase stability by developing explicit strategies to ease transitions related to this inevitable turnover.
- ❖ Reasons for superintendent turnover typically vary based on school district characteristics and superintendents' career advancement goals.
- ❖ While poor superintendent–board relationships contribute to superintendent turnover, they only account for a small proportion of California's high turnover.
- ❖ While generally more predictable due to electoral cycles, board turnover has important implications for the development of trustee onboarding practices.

School district improvement requires careful, sustained attention, but education leaders and researchers note that this leaves attempts at sustainable changes vulnerable to turnover. As Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn wrote in *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems*:

The main threat to coherence is turnover at the top with new leaders who come in with their own agenda. It is not turnover per se that is the problem, but rather discontinuity of direction. Sometimes systems performing poorly do require a shakeup, but we have also seen situations where new leaders disrupt rather than build on the good things that have happened... The idea in changeover ideally combines continuity and innovation. As we have said, coherence making and re-making is a never-ending proposition.¹³¹

A key consideration for boards, then, is to plan for successful leadership transitions. In his book *What School Boards Can Do: Reform Governance for Urban Schools*, Donald R. McAdams observed that since ambitious reform likely operates on timelines that outlast board terms and superintendent tenure, districts should plan for gradually evolving teams and implement systems that are designed to uphold major initiatives throughout transitions.¹³² As discussed in **Section I: Setting and Vision and Goals** on page 6 and the earlier discussion of community engagement, strong support throughout the system can improve the longevity of a strategy or initiative.^{133,134}



If the vision and goals are clearly shared throughout the system, those who enter the school district during improvement initiatives are more likely to be integrated into the system so they contribute to efforts, rather than inadvertently weaken them. This is especially true in the hiring and onboarding of the superintendent, a major responsibility of boards. If, for example, the school district has agreed upon a set of goals and invested in major initiatives, board members should make it clear that they expect the superintendent to commit to continuing that work.

In the remainder of this section, we focus on research about superintendent and board turnover. While we did not review the research on turnover among other central office staff, a logical assumption would be that greater turnover among this high-level staff presents similar challenges to school district stability.

Understanding Superintendent Turnover

Superintendents play a crucial role in implementing the steps needed for school districts to meet board priorities, yet the average superintendent tenure can challenge the sustainability of initiatives, especially ambitious efforts. Furthermore, misconceptions about why superintendents leave their positions might lead to boards addressing recruitment and retention in ineffective ways. A few recent studies can provide context for understanding the main reasons and frequency of superintendent turnover.

Nationwide, superintendent turnover is high in the largest urban school districts, and the length of their tenure in these school districts has been declining in recent years. A 2014 survey from

the Council of the Great City Schools found that the average length of tenure for superintendents in the nation's largest urban school districts was 3.18 years, down from 3.64 years in the 2010 survey.¹³⁵

In California, superintendent turnover is highest in the largest school districts. A 2012 study of over 200 randomly selected California school districts indicated that among 90 percent of the districts (excluding the largest ten percent), 43 percent of superintendents left their posts within three years; conversely, 57 percent stayed for four or more years. However, 71 percent of superintendents from the largest 10 percent of the selected districts (enrolling 29,000 or more students) left before their fourth year. The researchers cautioned that just looking at superintendent turnover in California's largest school districts can be misleading, since these tend to get the most media attention when superintendents exit.¹³⁶

Common lore suggests that superintendent turnover often stems from poor superintendent–board relations, yet a 2012 California study did not confirm that belief. Among the 99 school districts (out of 222 total in the study) that reported turnover during the three years of the study, the most common reason was retirement. In those that experienced turnover *not* due to retirement, superintendents most often left to enhance their career prospects. Despite challenges in larger, urban school districts, superintendents tended to move toward these positions due to their greater salary and prestige. One school district characteristic that is associated with increased superintendent turnover is student poverty.

Even controlling for size, there is an inverse association between wealth and turnover—with more turnover in school districts with greater student poverty. While contentious relationships with the school board—pegged to operational ineffectiveness and conflict more generally—were predictors of superintendent exit, in most of the 222 school districts, *both* the board and the superintendent rated the board as high functioning and as having a positive mutual relationship. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the pressures associated with large and low-income school districts, these were more likely to report high-conflict school boards with poor superintendent relations.¹³⁷

In another study of superintendent and board member turnover, Thomas Alsbury looked at the relationship between turnover and student achievement over the course of eight years in Washington state. Overall, the author found no statistically significant relationship between superintendent turnover and students' performance on the state's standardized tests. However, in small districts—those with 500 or fewer students—superintendent continuity was associated with a small decline in scores. Alsbury discussed possible reasons for this difference, speculating that small districts may be more vulnerable to stagnation. Citing research that very small districts are more likely to have home-grown superintendents with deeper connections to the community, the author suggested the superintendents may respond to pressure by avoiding conflict and thus, not tackling issues that might be contentious.¹³⁸ In addition, the leadership style of a superintendent, for good or ill, is likely to have a more visible impact in smaller districts.

Board Turnover

Though generally more predictable given the nature of election cycles, very little research has addressed factors related to board turnover or its impact. Alsbury argued that when discussing board member turnover, researchers and practitioners should distinguish between political and apolitical board turnover (electoral defeat vs. less political reasons such as a move to a larger district or personal circumstance). In his study of board turnover in Washington state, Alsbury reported a statistically significant relationship between increasing board turnover and declining achievement scores, especially in cases with low politically motivated board turnover; while low board turnover was associated with higher student achievement.¹³⁹



A comprehensive review of the research about effective board and superintendent relationships found that many board members begin their tenure with only a vague understanding of the distinction between board and superintendent roles, which makes school district improvement efforts more challenging.¹⁴⁰ Thus, boards would do well to ensure a careful onboarding process that shortens the learning curve. The board–superintendent relationship is discussed further in *Section VII: The Impact of Board Relationships and Roles* on page 34.

Furthermore, in the case of ambitious school district reform, board members would be wise to schedule study sessions that address the established vision and goals, along with a summary of the prior work and progress made. Setting aside time to give new board members the “big picture” is an opportunity for the full board to evaluate the existing work, adapt as necessary, build a common understanding of the improvement efforts, and further embed the overarching goals in the work moving forward.

Conclusion

School district leadership turnover is inevitable and can challenge the momentum and sustainability of school district improvement efforts, but boards can increase the sustainability of initiatives by developing explicit strategies to ease transitions. In California, poor superintendent–board relationships account for a small proportion of turnover in the state. Professional development can ensure that these relationships remain healthy and help improve those that are contentious. Finally, although board turnover is more predictable due to electoral cycles, it presents important considerations for the development of onboarding programs.



Part II:

Board-Specific Research

The following two sections explore school board-specific research: Section VII covers board relationships and roles, and Section VIII addresses board training and professional learning.

Section VII.

The Impact of Board Relationships and Roles

Key Points in This Section:

- ❖ It is important for board members to understand their roles and establish good relationships with each other and staff.
- ❖ The board plays a central role in setting a vision and goals for their school district or county office of education.
- ❖ Effective boards work collaboratively with their superintendent and other staff.
- ❖ Community engagement is a central responsibility for board members.
- ❖ Boards can empower staff to be more effective by being clear about expectations while respecting their roles.

School districts and county offices of education are complex organizations. To be effective, they require clearly defined roles and responsibilities and a positive working relationship between leadership and staff. In school districts and county offices of education, board members and the superintendent form the leadership team and entrust central office and school staff with running programs effectively and carrying out their vision.

Relationships are critical to accomplishing school district and county office of education goals for serving students. These include the relationships between the board and superintendent, among board members, and between the board and other staff. Each entity has its role in accomplishing these goals, and understanding the parameters of these roles is central to maintaining effective working relationships.

CSBA outlines five board responsibilities that support this central role. These board member responsibilities are to: 1) set direction for the school district or county office of education; 2) establish structure through policy; 3) provide support for implementation efforts; 4) ensure accountability through oversight and monitoring; and 5) act as community leaders. Together, these responsibilities represent functions so fundamental to a school system's accountability to the public that only an elected governing body can perform them. Board members fulfill these responsibilities by working together with the superintendent as a governance team to make decisions that will best serve all the students in the community. Another central role of boards is to represent the values, beliefs, and priorities of their communities.



Research has identified several factors related to the fulfillment of critical board roles and the establishment of positive relationships associated with boards in school districts that successfully improve student outcomes.

Establishing and Supporting a Vision and Goals

The Waters and Marzano review of 27 studies linking superintendent leadership and student achievement identified the importance of boards and superintendents working together to set goals collaboratively. This analysis also found it critical for boards to be aligned with and supportive of the goals that the superintendent identifies as absolutely essential and non-negotiable, and to ensure that these goals become the primary focus of school district efforts—not allowing other initiatives to distract from them.¹⁴¹ The Council of the Great City Schools also identified a common vision and goals between the board and superintendent as a precondition for success in their case study analysis of three urban school districts that improved student achievement.¹⁴² In addition, the Southern Regional Education Board study revealed the effect of the board–superintendent relationship at the school level—principals said they felt more supported when their board and superintendent shared a common framework, mission, and goals.¹⁴³

Working Collaboratively: Governance Team, Superintendent, and School District Staff

Research has indicated that the importance of collaboration extends beyond that of the board and superintendent. It includes collaboration between the board and other school district staff as well as among individual board members. In the National School Boards Association report that examined the features of effective boards, the authors found that “effective boards lead

as a united team, with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.”¹⁴⁴ This is supported by an observational study of over 100 board meetings that revealed that board members in low-performing school districts advanced their own agenda during meetings more often than in higher-performing school districts—members were observed monopolizing meeting time in 59 percent of low-performing school districts.¹⁴⁵

Engaging the Community

Research indicates that positive community relations are essential to sustainable improvement in a school district. As elected members of their communities, board members have a natural and important role in fostering this relationship. In the series of case studies by the Council of the Great City Schools about how school districts improve, the authors highlighted the ability of the board and superintendent to assure stakeholders and the community that their vision is an important and effective improvement strategy.¹⁴⁶ The Lighthouse Study also highlights a strong connection between the board and community as one of the conditions for student achievement.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, in the study on the effectiveness of boards at implementing and sustaining local initiatives in 39 school districts, the authors found that board members from high-performing districts invested a greater amount of time with government and community agencies to enhance the school district’s ability to raise student achievement.¹⁴⁸

While community engagement is not solely the responsibility of board members, they can ensure that their school district or county office of education has a robust community engagement strategy, including opportunities for input during the development of the vision, goals, and the LCAP. As elected officials in their communities, board

members interact with the public on a regular basis. This provides them with opportunities to hear questions and concerns about local public schools and education overall, and share what they learn with their fellow board members and district staff.

Empowering Staff

Another common thread in the school board research is the importance of understanding the roles and responsibilities of the board as vision-setters and policy-makers, and of superintendents and other staff as implementers. This is reflected in the case studies by the Council of the Great City Schools, which identified the board's ability to focus on "policy level decisions that support improved student achievement, rather than on the day-to-day operations of the district," as a precondition for success.¹⁴⁹ The Lighthouse Study also found that school districts with higher levels of student achievement had a balance between district-wide direction from leadership—including the board—and school-level autonomy.¹⁵⁰

The board–superintendent relationship is also critical when considering staff empowerment. The analysis by the Southern Regional Education Board found that in school districts with effective boards, the superintendent and the board worked together to establish the vision, while the superintendent was responsible for executing the plan and was credited by the board for the resulting student improvements.¹⁵¹ In the study of nine school districts by LaRocque and Coleman, successful and unsuccessful boards had equal trust for the superintendent. However, successful boards had a more balanced relationship. These boards were more demanding of the superintendent while the superintendent was also found to be a more empowered leader—not just following orders but also providing valuable guidance and expertise.¹⁵²

The Changing Role of County Offices of Education

The move toward local control in California, strongly reflected in the LCFF and the implementation of the LCAPs, has meant a shift in the role of county offices of education. As a report by the Public Policy Institute of California



highlighted, county offices of education play a critical role in providing guidance to school districts in the LCAP development process. They can also contribute by collaborating with underperforming school districts to identify potential solutions.¹⁵³ This shift in responsibility, from a focus on compliance to one of collaborative support and technical assistance, will require professional development and additional capacity for county office staff. County boards can support this shift in the focus of their county offices of education by dedicating resources and bolstering efforts by county office of education staff to provide effective guidance and support to school districts.

Conclusion

All of the findings in this section highlight the important role that effective boards play in collaborating with the superintendent and with each other to set the school district vision and goals, engage the community, and empower central office and school staff to implement initiatives that will bring the vision and goals to fruition. Relationships are key to the ability of a board member to improve student achievement in their school district, and a key part of establishing good relationships is board members' understanding of their roles as policy-makers and vision-setters, while respecting the roles of the superintendents and staff. As will be explored in the following section, training and professional learning can help board members better understand their roles and responsibilities, and foster a more positive relationship with staff at all levels.

Section VIII.

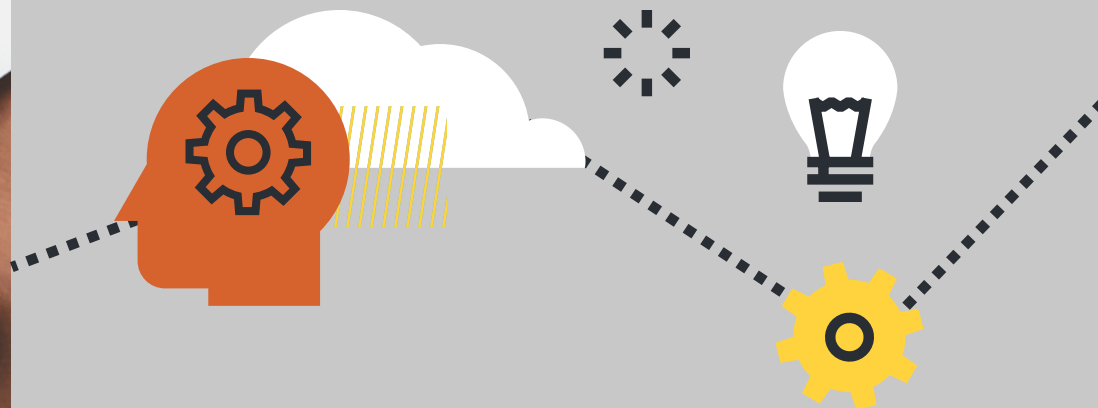
Training and Professional Learning for Board Members



Key Points in This Section:

- ❖ Professional learning for board members and whole boards is important for helping them to support the conditions for school district improvement.
- ❖ There is evidence that board professional learning can help to improve student outcomes in a school district.
- ❖ Governance training is particularly important to help board members stay focused on student achievement.
- ❖ Training on board member roles and the relationship with the superintendent can help them work more closely as a team.

Training and professional learning for board members can enhance their ability to carry out their roles and responsibilities in ways that support the factors associated with improving student achievement in a school district. Board members come to the job with a range of experience and backgrounds in public education, and with various levels of understanding of the local, county, state, and federal laws and policies that affect their schools. In addition, every board is different according to the conditions in the school district or county office of education, and the experience and understanding of individual board members. While research discussed in this section supports that all boards need training in certain areas, boards as a whole and individual board members also need training according to their particular needs and the concerns of their communities. Moreover, for effective boards, training and professional learning is not a one-time event—boards and board members can benefit from a range of professional learning over time. As their understanding grows, their needs change, and the conditions of the local, state, and federal education landscape will continue to unfold.





Research on effective school boards and effective school district leadership strongly supported the conclusion that professional learning is essential and suggested the most productive areas for this training. These include:

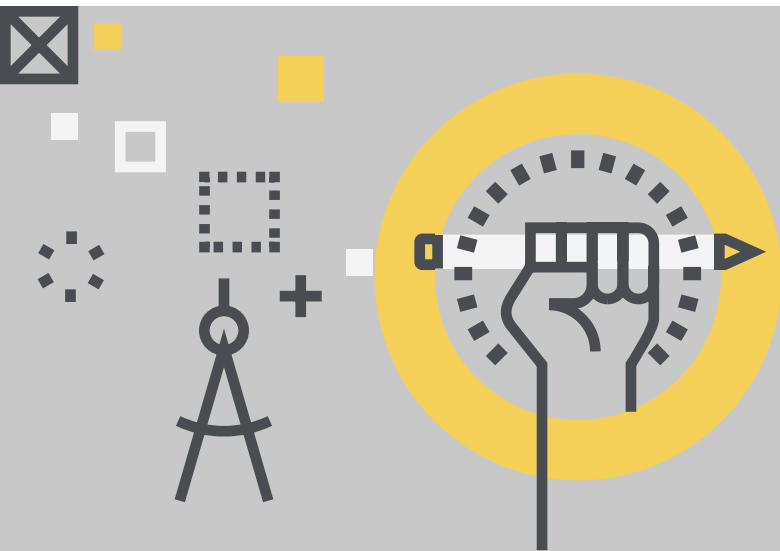
- 1. Covering the basics of the job**, including bringing board members up to speed on policies and regulations that help them meet their fiduciary responsibilities;
- 2. Improving governance practices** to ensure that meetings are run efficiently and that effective protocols are in place, so that meetings can focus on student achievement;
- 3. Understanding the distinction between the role of the board and that of the superintendent and staff** to ensure that the board supports school district efforts effectively and focuses on working collaboratively to set policies and direction;
- 4. Learning about ways of improving student outcomes and closing achievement gaps** to ensure that board members become champions of learning effectiveness and equity in how they set goals and policies—and make investments—so that all students are supported in their schools and receive the instruction and supports they need to achieve their potential; and
- 5. Engaging the community and public leadership** to ensure that board members can best advocate for the broader needs of their schools and community, informed by a deep understanding of community needs.

Trends from a 2010 Nationally Representative Survey of Board Members

According to the survey by the National School Boards Association, the Iowa School Boards Foundation, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, individual board members reported participating in the following activities in the past year:

- ❖ State-level conferences (66 percent);
- ❖ Whole-board seminars or workshops (63 percent);
- ❖ Seminars or workshops for individual board members (59 percent); and
- ❖ National-level conferences (27 percent).

Moreover, participation in these activities was more likely for board members from school districts with larger student enrollment. According to the board presidents/chairs whose board did not participate in whole-board development, the most common reasons for not participating were scheduling conflicts (45 percent), cost (19 percent), open meeting laws (13 percent), and not seeing the benefit (13 percent).¹⁵⁴



Research on Effects of Professional Learning and Board Training

There is evidence that professional development for all school district leaders can lead to improved student outcomes. For example, embedded professional learning and ongoing inquiry for school district leadership was one of the conditions for supporting student achievement in the first phase of the Lighthouse Study.¹⁵⁵ A later phase of the Lighthouse Study specifically highlighted the importance of board member professional development. During this phase, technical assistance and support was provided to the board and superintendent of several pilot districts while researchers studied how and to what extent this assistance affected conditions that foster student achievement. The technical assistance focused on:

1. Developing a clear, compelling, and shared focus for school improvement and a belief that all students can learn and succeed;
2. Using action research (an ongoing process of identifying a problem, gathering data on the problem, identifying and implementing a solution, and gathering data on the solution) to improve the effectiveness of the system in helping students learn; and
3. Developing leadership to support and sustain the improvement efforts.

“Research on effective school boards and effective school district leadership strongly supported a conclusion that professional learning is essential for effective boards

By the end of the third year of the pilot, researchers saw growth in conditions for improvement including board members’ raised perceptions and beliefs that all students can learn and succeed, along with a statistically significant gain in reading or math scores for four of the five sites.¹⁵⁶

Research on Board Governance Training

Other studies have pointed to the importance of professional development with a specific focus on board governance. The conclusion is that when a board uses effective governance strategies, it has more time and energy during and outside of meetings to focus on the factors that support better student outcomes—improving student achievement, engaging the community, and setting a collaborative relationship with the superintendent and other district staff. A study on the effectiveness of boards at implementing and sustaining local initiatives in 39 school districts found that a specific focus on governance training could have the greatest impact.¹⁵⁷ The observational study of over 100 school board meetings found that when compared to those in medium- and high-performing school districts, meetings in low-performing districts were less orderly, focused less time on student achievement, and had board members that were less respectful of and attentive to the community. According to the authors, these findings suggested that boards, especially in low-performing districts, would benefit from professional development focused on the areas found to be problematic—running meetings effectively, focusing on student achievement, respectfully listening to community input, and improving internal board relationships as well as the relationship between the board and the superintendent.¹⁵⁸

The Effect of Board Training on the Superintendent Relationship

Research has found that training about improving the board–superintendent relationship should be a priority, given the importance of this relationship to how well a district functions. Moreover, while this research indicated that both superintendents and board members found most board–superintendent relationships to be satisfactory or better,¹³³ this is not always the case. Tension between boards and superintendents can result from a range of factors, several of which can be addressed by board professional development, including training on role clarity and sharing responsibility.¹³⁴

- ❖ **Role confusion.** In a comprehensive review of the research about board and superintendent relationships, it was found that board members often begin their terms with limited knowledge of the superintendent’s role, leading to role confusion. The authors further noted that this tension “can be avoided through extensive board member onboarding and continuous professional development.”¹³⁵
- ❖ **Sharing responsibility.** Boards need training on how to be engaged in collaborative decision-making, as it takes practice and training to do this well. This can include professional development for board members on how to find their voice and use it effectively and how to form positive relationships. This can help to mitigate power struggles among board members and between the board and superintendent.¹³⁶

The importance of board training to build a shared vision is further emphasized in the National School Boards Association report that examined the features of effective boards. The authors concluded that “effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendent, to build shared knowledge, values and commitment for their improvement efforts.”¹³⁷

Board training and guidance on establishing an effective superintendent contract can also help to mitigate many challenges by establishing the foundation for a positive relationship. CSBA’s Education Legal Alliance has developed a superintendent contract template to help with this, which can be [requested through the CSBA website](#).



Conclusion

As champions of public education, lifelong learning is a value that board members can commit to and model for their county offices of education, school districts, schools, and community. In addition to the professional development topics covered in this section, board training on each of the six factors linked to school district improvement explored in this report can also support improved student achievement. Moreover, with the changing education landscape in California, there will be a continued need to train new and existing board members on new standards, assessments, regulations, and legislation that can affect the operations of their county offices of education and school districts. Trained and informed board members are also better stewards of public education—more effectively communicating with the community about the importance of public education and the challenges and opportunities faced by public schools, thereby fostering a better-engaged community dedicated to continuous learning and to supporting public education for all children.

CSBA is strongly committed to providing quality professional development, research, and information on important topics and to ensuring that board members continue to advocate for equity and closing achievement gaps. As one of the 26 states where board training is not mandated,¹³⁸ we will continue to fill the important role of ensuring that board members can be among the most effective supporters of public education in their county offices of education, school districts, communities, and the state.

CSBA Professional Learning Opportunities

Conferences

- ❖ **Annual Education Conference and Trade Show.** CSBA's premier continuing education program delivers practical solutions to help governance teams from districts and county offices of education to improve student learning and achievement.
- ❖ **California County Boards of Education (CCBE) Annual Conference.** This conference provides county board members and superintendents with a learning opportunity specifically focused on the unique issues and student populations facing counties.

For New Board Members

- ❖ **Orientation for New Trustees.** A one-day orientation for new trustees that prepares them for their first 100 days of service.
- ❖ **Institute for New and First-Term Board Members.** This innovative two-day seminar is one of the best opportunities for newly elected and first-term trustees to learn about their unique role and responsibilities.

Advanced Professional Development

- ❖ **Masters in Governance.** A comprehensive five-course program that equips board members and superintendents with the knowledge and skills to build and support an effective governance structure.
- ❖ **Leadership Institute.** A biennial two-day event uniquely designed to provide board members with relevant, engaging, hands-on content and critical strategies that will advance the leadership skills and capacity of their governance team.
- ❖ **The Brown Act: What You Need to Know.** A fact-filled workshop that covers the intricacies of the Brown Act.
- ❖ **Board Presidents Workshop.** A workshop that provides current and aspiring board presidents with tools for focused leadership.
- ❖ **Legal Symposium for Experienced Board Members.** A full-day, pre-conference seminar held in conjunction with the Annual Education Conference and Trade Show, where experts in education offer their legal perspective on the timely and complex issues boards often face.
- ❖ **Governance Consulting Services.** CSBA experts provide in-district training, workshops, resources, and guidance for building effective governance teams.
- ❖ **Training for Executive Assistants.** A one-day training focused on helping executive assistants forge an effective partnership with the board and superintendent and provide effective support.

Advocacy Opportunities

- ❖ **Legislative Action Day.** This event is a full day of advocacy meetings between school governance leaders and members of the California Legislature and their staffs.
- ❖ **Advocacy Institute.** Hosted annually by the National School Boards Association, this is an opportunity for school board members across the country to go to Washington, D.C., to meet with their congressional representatives and discuss federal education issues.

Educational Webcasts

- ❖ **Forecast Webcast.** This annual webcast features an in-depth discussion on the most pertinent topics to prepare board members for the year ahead.
- ❖ **Back to School Webcast.** This annual webcast gives board members a front-row seat to the most pressing issues of the upcoming academic year.
- ❖ **Education Insights Webcasts and Webinars.** These provide members with in-depth information on hot topics related to important educational issues.

Recurring Publications and Guidance

- ❖ **California Schools Magazine.** This quarterly magazine provides in-depth articles on issues of relevance to board members.
- ❖ **Briefs and Fact Sheets.** These information briefs and fact sheets cover the research, best practices, and recommendations for board members on topics covering conditions of children, effective governance, fair funding, and student achievement.
- ❖ **Monthly Newsletter.** The monthly newsletter provides board members with important updates on state educational issues and opportunities.
- ❖ **California School News Weekly Updates.** These update emails keep members informed about relevant policies, news, and opportunities that can affect their schools.
- ❖ **Legal Guidance and Alerts.** CSBA provides detailed guidance and alerts from in-house legal experts.

Special Publications

- ❖ **Meeting California's Challenge: Access, Opportunity, and Achievement: Key Ingredients for Success**
- ❖ **California's Challenge: Adequately Funding Education in the 21st Century**
- ❖ **Charter Schools: A Guide for Governance Teams**
- ❖ **The Brown Act: School Boards and Open Meeting Laws**
- ❖ **Call to Order: A Blueprint for Great Board Meetings**

A graphic illustration featuring a pencil on the left, a yellow document with horizontal lines in the center, a globe on the right, and a keyboard below the document. A dashed line connects the pencil tip to the globe, and another dashed line connects the pencil tip to the keyboard.

Part III:

Annotated Bibliography

Key Studies on School Board Relationship to Student Learning Outcomes

The following annotated bibliography provides information on 11 key research studies that include a specific focus on one or more aspect(s) of how school boards affect student achievement.

School board member and superintendent turnover and the influence on student achievement

T. L. Alsbury (2008). Reported in a peer reviewed journal, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 7(2), 202–229.

Question: What is the relationship (if any) between school board member and superintendent turnover and student test scores?

Methods: Researchers surveyed all superintendents in Washington State about board member and/or superintendent changes between 1993 and 2001. They used statistical methods to determine how likely it was that change in student test scores (either up or down) during those years was related to the turnover of either board members or superintendents.

Findings: Over the course of the eight years of the study, districts with higher school board turnover had lower student test scores and districts with lower school board turnover had higher student test scores. The study did not find a relationship between student test scores and superintendent turnover except in the case of small districts (500 students or fewer), where student test scores were higher when superintendent turnover was higher and lower when turnover was lower.

The lighthouse inquiry phase I: Examining the role of school board leadership in the improvement of student achievement

M. L. Delagardelle (2008). Reported in a book chapter from T. L. Alsbury (Ed.), *The future of school board governance: Relevance and revelation* (pp. 191–223). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Question: What are the characteristics, behaviors, and beliefs of board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers in districts that are high performing in terms of student achievement compared to those in similar districts that are low performing?

Methods: In-depth individual interviews were conducted over two years (1998-2000) with board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers.

Findings: There was a significant difference in beliefs between school board members in high- and low-achieving districts: those in high-achieving districts often expressed a positive belief in students' potential and in the district staffs' ability to improve achievement, while those in low-achieving districts did not express this belief and more often blamed outside factors and the students themselves for low achievement. Interviews revealed seven conditions that were present in the higher-achieving districts and were associated with productive school boards: 1) shared decision-making, information, and engagement in improvement efforts; 2) understanding what it takes to improve achievement; 3) comprehensive and varied support focused on helping staff improve student learning; 4) embedded and ongoing professional development, consistent with research about how to improve classroom practice; 5) a balance between districtwide direction and site-level autonomy; 6) strong community connections; and 7) leadership at all levels of the system to provide direction and focus for the improvement work.

The lighthouse inquiry, phase IIa and IIb: Examining the role of school board leadership in the improvement of student achievement

M. L. Delagardelle (2008). Reported in a book chapter from T. L. Alsbury (Ed.), *The future of school board governance: Relevance and revelation* (pp. 191–223). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Question: Can technical assistance to governance teams focused on the seven conditions associated with higher-achieving districts (uncovered in Phase I of the study) improve those conditions, leading to better student outcomes?

Methods: Over five years, from 2002-07 in five Midwestern states, researchers provided technical assistance to local governance teams on districtwide improvement efforts and concurrently studied the role of boards and superintendents in these efforts. Researchers conducted surveys, observations, and focus groups related to the seven conditions and tracked student achievement over the five years of the study in an attempt to determine if the technical assistance led to changes in governance team behavior and to improvements in student outcomes.

Findings: After three years, there were positive changes in governance team beliefs, conditions, and student achievement. Superintendents and board members demonstrated changes in the beliefs that had been associated with higher student achievement, including that boards can impact student achievement; that adults in the school can have an effect on student learning; and that professional learning, frequently monitoring student learning, allocating resources for the earliest school experiences, and partnering with the community, are all important. In addition, increases in some of the conditions associated with higher student achievement included distributed leadership, small-group collaboration time, a sense of urgency for improvement created by district leaders, and the board's increased reliance on multiple sources of information when making decisions. These changes in beliefs and conditions were concurrent with statistically significant student gains on a number of achievement measures in grades K-12. This research also revealed superintendent and board member beliefs about the school board role, i.e., that the key roles of the board are to: 1) set clear expectations for outcomes of improvement work; 2) hold themselves and district staff accountable; 3) support the conditions for success in the system; 4) build the collective will of the staff and community to improve student learning; and 5) create time to learn together as a board and engage in extensive dialogue with each other to establish consensus about vision and strategies.

School board governance and student achievement: School board members' perceptions of their behaviors and beliefs

B. Plough (2014). Reported in peer-reviewed journal: *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*. Volume 25 (pp. 41-53).

Question: How do perceptions, behaviors, and beliefs differ between school board members in high-performing districts and those in similar districts that are low-performing?

Methods: This survey study of 105 board members in 22 low-performing California school districts and 82 school board members in 17 high-performing school districts—with similar demographic and economic profiles—addressed board member perceptions, behaviors, and beliefs related to the seven “Key areas of Board Performance” from the 2008 seminal Lighthouse Study.

Findings: While the overall responses in the seven key areas demonstrated more similarities than differences in the two groups of board members, the responses also indicated notable differences in three key areas. Those from the higher-achieving districts scored higher on demonstrating commitment, deliberative policy development, and connecting with the community. Regarding the latter, school board members from high-performing districts spent more time interacting with government and community agencies to enhance the district's ability to raise student achievement. Authors felt that the overall implications of the study were that 1) governance training, as opposed to sessions dedicated to specific information or topics, might have the greatest impact and 2) there is a strong need for more research about school board preparation and training, particularly to determine the type most beneficial for school boards and their work to raise student achievement.

The politics of excellence: Leadership and school district ethos

L. L. LaRocque (1993). Reported in a peer reviewed journal: *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 39(4), 449–475.

Question: What was the difference in terms of knowledge, beliefs/values, and activities among school board members in districts where board policy initiatives were successfully implemented versus those where they were not?

Methods: This interview study of board members in nine British Columbia school districts—all of which had similar board policy initiatives—over a five-year period looked at the factors that contributed to the successful implementation of these policies in five of the nine districts. Interview questions were about norms and practices, fiscal decision-making, and performance monitoring.

Findings: The study found that the measures in the five districts that successfully implemented their policy initiatives included: 1) widespread awareness; 2) serious discussion of the issues and professional norms during board meetings; and 3) changes in relevant practices. Researchers found that successful boards had greater knowledge about district programs and practices that was gleaned from multiple sources; had more knowledge of district monitoring; had a clear vision based on a set of firmly held values and beliefs; and engaged in a greater variety of activities that provided them with opportunities to articulate these values and beliefs. In addition, successful boards focused on the policy level rather than day-to-day operations level and gave professional staff wide latitude; engaged in two-way exchanges of ideas with district staff; balanced controlling costs with a concern about providing quality education; considered academic achievement as their main responsibility; were concerned about serving high-need students; prioritized performance data to determine program success; supported extensive professional development even in times of cost-cutting; and spent more time and energy than less successful boards did on ensuring that district programs and practices supported achievement.

Less successful boards had vaguer knowledge about curricular programs and monitoring practices (e.g. board members relied on district staff to determine what the board needed to know; the budget focus was solely on keeping costs low; exchanges with staff primarily involved listening to concerns; monitoring was focused primarily on district administration results; and public reporting was focused on “success stories” rather than performance data). Finally, while unsuccessful boards had shared values and beliefs, theirs were not as clearly articulated, didn't serve as a basis for board initiatives as frequently, or inform as many program and monitoring decisions as those of successful boards.

School district leadership that works: The effects of superintendent leadership on student achievement

J.T. Waters and R.J. Marzano (2006). Reported in a research paper for *Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning*, Denver, CO.

Question: What is the influence of school district leaders on student performance?

Methods: Researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 27 leadership studies, all of which connected survey findings to a measure of student achievement. The studies were conducted between 1970 and 2005 in 2,817 districts and included achievement scores of 3.4 million students across the 27 studies. The primary focus of most studies was superintendents, but board members and others were also included.

Findings: The study found five district-level leadership responsibilities that had a moderately statistically significant correlation with student academic achievement. A finding that was specifically related to boards was that in districts with higher levels of student achievement, the board was aligned with and supportive of district leaders' non-negotiable goals and ensured that they were the primary focus of district efforts—not allowing other initiatives to distract them. The authors speculated that in districts with a positive correlation on this factor, board members may protect the district from initiatives that divert resources from or do not serve the key goals. The authors suggested that board members can support other goals without a cost to student achievement, when these do not detract energy and/or funding from the main goals. However, when individual board member interests and expectations distract from board-adopted achievement and instructional goals, they may work in opposition to those goals.

The problem: Low-achieving districts and low-performing boards

D. E. Lee and D. W. Eadens (2012). Reported in a peer-reviewed journal: *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership*, 9(3), 1–13.

Question: How (if at all) do school board behaviors in board meetings differ between high-, medium-, and low-performing districts?

Methods: Video recordings were made of 115 board meetings randomly chosen from across the country and including districts from 25 states. Members of the research team viewed their respective videos and used a 5-point Likert scale to answer ten questions about their observable behavior during the meeting. Researchers categorized districts as high-, medium-, or low-performing according to each state's system of judging performance and analyzed if there were statistically significant differences in observed board behavior between different performance levels.

Findings: There were marked differences between board behaviors in low- and high-performing districts. In low-performing districts, much more often than in medium- and high-performing districts, meetings were less orderly and did not flow well (e.g., the agenda was not followed, was not well-organized, and/or was difficult to follow); devoted less time to student achievement; did not act on policy items; had members that were less respectful and attentive when listening to speakers; and had one or more members that appeared to be advancing their own agenda and/or monopolizing meeting time during meetings. When researchers looked at: 1) whether board members and superintendents seemed to have a good working relationship; 2) if there was evidence of collaboration between the superintendent and board members; and 3) the degree of community input—they found that all of these factors were lower in low-performing districts. On the other hand, in board meetings in three quarters of high- and medium-performing districts, researchers observed that no one member, other than the board president, took a disproportionate amount of time; nearly all were reported as flowing well; and most acted on policy items during the recorded meeting. The authors suggested these findings indicate that boards, especially in low-performing districts, would benefit from training programs in the areas found to be problematic: running meetings; focusing on student achievement, including community input; and fostering both internal board relationships and relationships with superintendents.

Foundations for success: Case studies of how urban school systems improve student achievement

J. Snipes, F. Doolittle, and C. Herlihy (2002). Report for the Council of the Great City Schools.

Question: Four urban districts that were improving student achievement and narrowing racial achievement gaps were asked: a) what was the context in which they raised achievement; b) what was the nature of the changes and their sources (e.g., specific schools or student groups); c) what district-level strategies were associated with improvement; and d) how were politics, practices, and strategies implemented at the district level and actual changes made to teaching and learning practices at the classroom level?

Methods: Case studies were conducted of four urban school districts in four different states that demonstrated a trend of: three or more years of overall student achievement; narrowing achievement gaps between white/non-white students; and improving at a rate faster than their respective states. These were compared to other similar districts that had not yet seen comparable improvements. Field research included interviews of central office staff, board members, employee organizations, community leadership, reporters, and local university faculty. Document analysis included district strategy memos, descriptions of key policy initiatives, and news clippings.

Findings: All four case study districts had experienced a period in the past when the school board was not working together productively and was not focused primarily on improving student achievement, but rather on administrative issues. Through board changes, all later developed a new board majority focused on policy level decisions and supporting improved student achievement rather than on the day-to-day operations of the district. All case study districts shared the following conditions: the superintendent and the board shared a vision about the goals and strategies for reforms; focused on the capacity to diagnose instructional problems; possessed the ability to convince district and city stakeholders of the vision for reform; focused on transforming district operations to support the schools; and matched new resources to support priorities. Strategies to achieve the district vision included: setting student achievement goals; establishing internal accountability; aligning curricula with state standards; supporting instructional practices to implement state standards; funneling extra resources to the lowest-performing schools; using data to inform accountability and improvement; and starting reforms at the elementary grade levels.

The following two sources are literature reviews. Several of the studies included within these reviews are cited individually throughout this report.

Eight characteristics of effective school boards: A review of the literature

C. Devarics and E. O'Brien (2011). Publication of NSBA's Center for Public Education.

Methods: Much of the research cited in this literature review focused on school board/district practices and approaches gleaned through interviews, surveys, observations, and qualitative measures, rather than in-depth quantitative analysis. Several studies also date back to the early 2000s or earlier. For the purpose of the review, authors identified "effective" boards as those operating in high-achieving districts, particularly those that are making significant strides despite serving large numbers of disadvantaged students.

Findings: Effective boards: 1) commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and high-quality instruction, with clearly defined goals toward that vision; 2) have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and the system's ability to teach all children at high levels; 3) are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement; 4) have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community, establish strong communications structures, and engage with internal and external stakeholders; 5) are data savvy; 6) align and sustain resources (including for professional development); 7) lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust; and 8) take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents (building shared knowledge, values, and commitments to improvement efforts).

Effective board and superintendent collaboration

Hanover Research. (2014). Literature review: Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pXE5w1>

Methods: The contributors performed a comprehensive review of the literature addressing the components of effective superintendent and school board relationships. It also highlighted effective strategies for board governance focusing on its impact on student achievement.

Findings: Together, the studies on board–superintendent relationships revealed that a strong and effective relationship is based on: 1) clear definitions of the duties and responsibilities of each; 2) collaboration based on frequent communications in and out of official settings; and 3) extensive board member onboarding and professional development (as many new board members enter with limited knowledge of superintendent and board roles and responsibilities). The review of research focused on the board impact on student achievement revealed that: school boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than school boards in low-achieving districts (from the Lighthouse Study); there is a statistically significant correlation between five specific district governance practices and higher student achievement; and there were clear differences between "functional" and "dysfunctional" school boards as they relate to student achievement (from Waters, J. T. and Marzano R.). Finally, the review of studies on how urban school districts improve revealed the importance of community buy-in with regard to improvement efforts in urban districts (from McAdams, D., "What School Boards Can Do: Reform Governance for Urban Schools" and Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., and Herlihy, C., "Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement").

Endnotes

- 1 Kirst, M. W., & Wirt, F. M. (2009). Local school boards, politics, and the community. In *The political dynamics of American education* (4th ed., pp. 131–157). Richmond, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.
- 2 National School Boards Association (NSBA). *Frequently asked questions: What is the school board's most important responsibility?* Retrieved from <https://www.nsba.org/about-us/frequently-asked-questions>
- 3 CSBA Vision, adopted January 2016. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pWhVw9>
- 4 Delagardelle, M. L. (2008). The lighthouse inquiry: Examining the role of school board leadership in the improvement of student achievement. In T. L. Alsbury (Ed.), *The future of school board governance: Relevance and revelation* (pp. 191–223). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- 5 Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art & practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Currency Doubleday. (p. 9).
- 6 Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2016). *Coherence: The right drivers in action for schools, districts, and systems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- 7 Supovitz, J. A. (2006). *The case for district-based reform: Leading, building, and sustaining school improvement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 8 See endnote 7
- 9 Robinson, V. M. J., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 44(5), 635–674. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1xvoAsC>
- 10 Waters, J. T., & Marzano R. J. (2006). *School district leadership that works: The effects of superintendent leadership on student achievement*. Denver, CO: Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning. Retrieved from http://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/ASC/4005RR_Superintendent_Leadership.pdf
- 11 Henig, J. R. (2012). The politics of data use. *Teachers College Record*, 114(11), 1–32.
- 12 See endnote 6
- 13 See endnote 10
- 14 Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- 15 See endnote 10
- 16 See endnote 7
- 17 See endnote 7 (p. 27)
- 18 LaRocque, L., & Coleman, P. (1993). The politics of excellence: Trustee leadership and school district ethos. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 39(4), 449–475.
- 19 Black, S. (2008). The keys to board excellence. *American School Board Journal*, 195(2), 34–35. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pW4lcc>
- 20 Devarics, C., & O'Brien, E. (2011). *Eight characteristics of effective school boards: Full report*. Alexandria, VA: Center for Public Education. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1k86k7c>
- 21 Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., & Herlihy, C. (2002). *Foundations for success: Case studies of how urban school systems improve student achievement*. Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pTm6IB>
- 22 See endnote 10
- 23 Petersen, G. J. (1999). Demonstrated actions of instructional leaders: An examination of five California superintendents. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 7(18). Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/553/676>
- 24 Southern Regional Education Board. (2010). *The three essentials: Improving schools requires district vision, district and state support, and principal leadership*. Atlanta, GA. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pT4xb5>
- 25 See endnote 9
- 26 See endnote 4
- 27 Shoher, A. F., & Hartney, M. T. (2014). *Does school board leadership matter?* Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pqDeTl>
- 28 Land, D. (2002). Local school boards under review: Their role and effectiveness in relation to students' academic achievement. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(2), 229–278.
- 29 Alsbury, T. L. (2008). School board member and superintendent turnover and the influence on student achievement: An application of the dissatisfaction theory. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 7(2), 202–229. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760701748428>
- 30 See endnote 19
- 31 See endnote 18
- 32 See endnote 4
- 33 Skrla, L., Scheurich, J. J., Johnson, J. F., Hogan, D., Koschoreck, J. W., & Smith, P. A. (2000). *Equity-driven achievement-focused school districts: A report on systemic school success in four Texas school districts serving diverse student populations*. Austin, TX: The Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pXS0SO>
- 34 See endnote 7
- 35 David, J. L., & Talbert, J. E. (2013). *Turning around a high-poverty district: Learning from Sanger*. San Francisco, CA: S.H. Cowell Foundation.
- 36 McAdams, D. R. (2006). *What school boards can do: Reform governance for urban schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- 37 See endnote 35 (p. 11)
- 38 See endnote 35
- 39 See endnote 24
- 40 See endnote 24
- 41 See endnote 10
- 42 See endnote 21
- 43 Honig, M. I., & Hatch, T. C. (2004). Crafting coherence: How schools strategically manage multiple, external demands. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 16–30.
- 44 Diamond, J. B. (2012). Accountability policy, school organization, and classroom practice: Partial recoupling and educational opportunity. *Education and Urban Society*, 44(2), 151–182.
- 45 Cuban, L. (2013). *Inside the black box of classroom practice: Change without reform in American education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- 46 Johnson, S. M., Marietta, G., Higgins, M. C., Mapp, K. L., & Grossman, A. (2015). *Achieving coherence in district improvement: Managing the relationship between the central office and schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. (p. 5).
- 47 See endnote 6
- 48 See endnote 6 (p. 20)
- 49 See endnote 7 (p. 28)
- 50 See endnote 46
- 51 Shannon, G. S., & Bylsma, P. (2004). *Characteristics of improved school districts: Themes from research*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pTaVQr>
- 52 Dailey, D., Fleischman, S., Gil, L., Holtzman, D., O'Day, J. A., & Vosmer, C. (2005). *Toward more effective school districts: A review of the knowledge*

- base. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pW0Y59>
- 53 See endnote 35
- 54 See endnote 6
- 55 See endnote 46
- 56 Finnigan, K. S., & Daly, A. J. (2012). Mind the gap: Organizational learning and improvement in an underperforming urban system. *American Journal of Education*, 119(1), 41–71.
- 57 Chrispeels, J. H., Burke, P. H., Johnson, P., & Daly, A. J. (2008). Aligning mental models of district and school leadership teams for reform coherence. *Education and Urban Society*, 40(6), 730–750.
- 58 O'Day, J. A. (2002). Complexity, accountability, and school improvement. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(3), 293–330.
- 59 See endnote 4
- 60 See endnote 24
- 61 See endnote 10
- 62 Marsh, J. A., Bertrand, M., & Huguet, A. (2015). Using data to alter instructional practice: The mediating role of coaches and professional learning communities. *Teachers College Record*, 117(4), 1-40.
- 63 Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Denver, CO: McREL International. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pmVEUu>
- 64 See endnote 35
- 65 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. (2010). *Use of education data at the local level from accountability to instructional improvement*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2qSdRdF>
- 66 Hess, F. M., & Meeks, O. (2010). *School boards circa 2010: Governance in the accountability era*. The National School Boards Association (NSBA), The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, and The Iowa School Boards Foundation. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pXWfh0>
- 67 See endnote 24
- 68 See endnote 65
- 69 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2015). *Teachers know best: Making data work for teachers and students*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1di5Fw7>
- 70 Education Technology Industry Network of SIIA. (2015). *SIIA vision k-20 survey results-2015*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pTdl1h>
- 71 Hanushek, E. A. (2002). Teacher quality. In L. T. Izumi & W. M. Evers (Eds.), *Teacher Quality*. Hoover Press. Retrieved from <http://stanford.io/2pWfc5L>
- 72 See endnote 69
- 73 Young, V. M. (2008). Supporting teachers' use of data: the role of organization and policy. In E. B. Mandinach, & M. Honey (Eds.), *Data-Driven School Improvement: Linking data and learning* (pp. 103-104). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- 74 Wayman, J. C., Conoly, K., Gasko, J., & Strinfield, S. Supporting equity inquiry with student data computer systems. In E. B. Mandinach, & M. Honey (Eds.), *Data-Driven School Improvement: Linking data and learning* (p. 173). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- 75 Symonds, K. W. (2004). *After the test: closing the achievement gaps with data*. Learning Point Associates and Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. Retrieved from <http://racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/symonds.pdf>
- 76 See endnote 46 (p. 12)
- 77 See endnote 35 (p. 13)
- 78 See endnote 35 (p. 11)
- 79 See endnote 46 (p. 21)
- 80 Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. L. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- 81 Datnow, A., Park, V., & Wohlstetter, P. (2007). *Achieving with data: How high-performing school systems use data to improve instruction for elementary students*. Los Angeles, CA: Center on Educational Governance, USC Rossier School of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.newschools.org/files/AchievingWithData.pdf>
- 82 Johnson, P. E., & Chrispeels, J. H. (2010). Linking the central office and its schools for reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(5), 738–775. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X10377346>
- 83 Marsh, J. A. (2012). Interventions promoting educators' use of data: Research insights and gaps. *Teachers College Record*, 14(11), 1–48.
- 84 Firestone, W. A., & González, R. A. (2007). Culture and Processes Affecting Data Use in School Districts. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 106(1), 132–154.
- 85 Coburn, C. E., & Turner, E. O. (2012). The practice of data use: An introduction. *American Journal of Education*, 118(2), 99–111.
- 86 Young, V. M., & Kim, D. H. (2010). Using assessments for instructional improvement: A literature review. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 18(19), 1–40. Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/809>
- 87 Bannister, N. A. (2015). Reframing practice: Teacher learning through interactions in a collaborative group. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 24(3), 347–372.
- 88 See endnote 4
- 89 See endnote 4
- 90 See endnote 20
- 91 See endnote 4
- 92 See endnote 52
- 93 See endnote 4
- 94 See endnote 18
- 95 See endnote 21
- 96 See endnote 24 (p. 16)
- 97 See endnote 10
- 98 See endnote 36
- 99 Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) & Partners for Each and Every Child. (2016). *LCFF: How can local control keep the promise of educational equity in CA?* Sacramento, CA. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pcn8AS>
- 100 London, R. A. (2016). *Family engagement practices in California schools*. Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC). Retrieved from http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_616RLR.pdf
- 101 Pomona Unified School District. *Promise of excellence: Strategic plan 2015-2020*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pqj1qo>
- 102 See endnote 7 (p. 213)
- 103 See endnote 7
- 104 Plough, B. (2014). School board governance and student achievement: School board members' perceptions of their behaviors and beliefs. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Professional Development*, 25, 41-53. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1028871.pdf>

Endnotes

- 105 See endnote 28
- 106 See endnote 52
- 107 See endnote 7
- 108 See endnote 7
- 109 Feldman, S., & Malagon, V. F. (2017). *Unlocking learning: Science as a lever for English learner equity*. Oakland, CA: Education Trust-West. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2qhcVmP>
- 110 Remold, J., Rosier, S., Sauerteig, D., Podkul, T., Bhanot, R., & Michalchik. (2014). *BaySci: A partnership for Bay Area Science Education: August 2014 evaluation report*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI Education. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pmXpRh>
- 111 See endnote 109
- 112 See endnote 7 (pp. 80-81)
- 113 See endnote 66
- 114 See endnote 4
- 115 See endnote 104
- 116 See endnote 4
- 117 Podolsky, A., & Sutchter, L. (2016). *California teacher shortages: a persistent problem*. Learning Policy Institute (LPI) and CSBA. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2kn0peT>
- 118 See endnote 71
- 119 Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., & Rockoff, J. E. (2011). The long-term impacts of teachers: Teacher value-added and student outcomes in adulthood. *National Bureau of Economic Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17699.pdf>
- 120 Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(1). Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/392>
- 121 See endnote 14 (p. 47)
- 122 Murphy, J. (2010). *The educator's handbook for understanding and closing achievement gaps*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- 123 Ronfeldt, M., Farmer, S. O., McQueen, K., & Grissom, J. A. (2015). Teacher collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement. *American Education Research Journal*, 52(3).
- 124 See endnote 14 (pp. 45-46)
- 125 See endnote 63 (p. 2)
- 126 Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2010). *Primary sources: America's teachers on America's schools*. Retrieved from http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources/pdfs/100646_ScholasticGates.pdf
- 127 Ladd, H. (2009). *Teachers' perceptions of their working conditions: How predictive of policy-relevant outcomes?* Washington, DC: Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER). Retrieved from <http://urbn.is/2pmRsUN>
- 128 Hirsch, E., Freitas, C., Church, K., & Villar, A. (2008). *Massachusetts teaching, learning and leading survey: Creating school conditions where teachers stay and students thrive*. New Teacher Center at UC Santa Cruz. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pcNWky>
- 129 Hirsch, E., Sioberg, A., & Germuth, A. (2010). *TELL Maryland: Listening to educators to create successful schools*. New Teacher Center at UC Santa Cruz. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2qJppnf>
- 130 See endnote 24
- 131 See endnote 6 (p. 128)
- 132 See endnote 36
- 133 See endnote 36
- 134 See endnote 7
- 135 Council of the Great City Schools. (2014). *Urban indicator: Urban school superintendents: Characteristics, tenure, and salary: Eighth survey and report*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pozgPi>
- 136 Grissom, J. A., & Andersen, S. (2012). Why superintendents turn over. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(6), 1146–1180.
- 137 See endnote 136
- 138 See endnote 29
- 139 See endnote 29
- 140 Hanover Research. (2014). *Effective board and superintendent collaboration*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pXE5w1>
- 141 See endnote 10
- 142 See endnote 21
- 143 See endnote 24
- 144 See endnote 20
- 145 Lee, D. E., & Eadens, D. W. (2012). The problem: Low-achieving districts and low-performing boards. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership*, 9(3).
- 146 See endnote 21
- 147 See endnote 4
- 148 See endnote 104
- 149 See endnote 21
- 150 See endnote 4
- 151 See endnote 24
- 152 See endnote 18
- 153 Warren, P. (2016). *Strengthening local K-12 accountability: The role of county offices of education*. Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC). Retrieved from http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_816PWR.pdf
- 154 See endnote 66
- 155 See endnote 4
- 156 See endnote 4
- 157 See endnote 104
- 158 See endnote 145
- 159 See endnote 136
- 160 Mountford, M. (2008). Historical and current tensions among board-superintendent teams: Symptoms or cause? In T. L. Alsbury (Ed.), *The future of school board governance: Relevance and revelation* (pp. 81–114). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- 161 See endnote 140
- 162 See endnote 160
- 163 See endnote 20
- 164 National School Boards Association (NSBA). (2012). *Mandated training for school board members*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2pmSiAV>