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Effective Best Practices for School Boards: Linking Local Governance With Student Academic Success

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**Effective Best Practices For
School Boards:
Linking Local Governance With
Student Academic Success**

**Special Report
prepared
for**

El Paso Leadership and Research Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effective Best Practices for School Boards: Linking Local Governance with Student Academic Success

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Many public issues are the shared responsibility of public and private organizations and, in the case of public, K-12 education, have direct links to employment, economic development and higher education issues. Representatives from each of these sectors are vitally interested in the success of public schools in their community. Questions about *Why Johnny Can't Read* coupled with the frustrations of business employers and higher educational institutions concerning the skill base and competencies of high school graduates culminated in legislative action and the establishment of student academic performance testing. With the state and federal government as well as the business and higher education community uniting in the call for student performance accountability, local school boards and superintendents are feeling the pressure from all quarters. Clarifying the roles of the board and superintendent in improving student achievement has become critical to the goal of increased academic performance.

In 1989, the Texas Business and Education Coalition was formed to address, on a statewide level, the need for dialogue between business professionals and educators regarding the improvement of public education for all students. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum was adopted by the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) in 1997 with input from parents, business leaders, educators, and school board trustees as the appropriate curriculum to prepare students for the 21st century high tech knowledge-based economy. Beginning in 2002, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS) test, replacing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), will be fully aligned with the curriculum

(TEKS). Thus, results on this criterion-referenced test will provide benchmarks for how students are progressing academically during their public school years. These state initiatives dovetail with federal legislation in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, championed by President George W. Bush.

In the summer of 2002 the Leadership Research Council commissioned the Institute for Policy and Economic Development at the University of Texas at El Paso to conduct a review of best practices for school boards and to evaluate whether best practices from the corporate and non-profit sector might be applicable to the governance of independent school districts in Texas. The Leadership Research Council expressed particular interest in the question of whether there was a linkage between school board best practices and increased student achievement.

The two primary research questions addressed in this report are:

- *Are there models or best practices that boards can engage in that will ensure student performance?*
- *Does the business or non-profit arena offer insights that may assist school boards in carrying out their responsibility to ensure student performance?*

Other key questions include:

- *How can the local school board simultaneously lead and support the efforts of professional educators?*
- *Should local school boards and the superintendent choose to follow the business model, which*

optimizes operational efficiency or the community-based model, which emphasizes local accountability?

The 1996 Texas Education Code states that “the primary responsibility for implementing the state’s system of public education and ensuring student performance” falls to the local school district or charter school.

- Measuring student success on a single, high-stakes performance test is not the same as ensuring student performance.
- In an ideal educational environment, a testing instrument that is fully aligned with state-approved curriculum should ideally garner results that reflect the student learning that has occurred in the classroom.
- The Texas SBOE uses its rulemaking authority to “create and implement a statewide assessment program that is knowledge-and skills-based to ensure school accountability for student achievement.”¹

Definitions of student achievement matter.

- Student achievement is more than passing a standardized test. A policy “that focuses only on an achievement gap may focus primary attention on reducing the gap rather than on increasing overall achievement levels of all students.”²
- A definition of student achievement that includes: 1) academic attainment reaching beyond what a state test or other standardized test currently measures; 2) job skills and preparation; 3) citizenship; 4) appreciation of arts; and, 5) development of character and values, may be desirable.

Key Finding:

¹ Texas Education Code, Subtitle H, Chapter 39, Subchapter B, §39.022.

² Davis, S.G. (1994). *The utility of Anderson’s framework: analyzing linkages between school board policies and efforts to reduce a black/white achievement gap*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan.

- *Empirical evidence linking school board practices with high levels of student achievement is so scant it is virtually non-existent.*

School boards have different approaches to policy-making.

- School board members tend to use a professional policy-making approach in matters concerning curriculum and instruction while personal judgment drives decision-making processes on financial and personnel issues.
- This suggests that it is important to understand the personal values, attitudes and beliefs of individual board members as the public and business community seek to understand school board decisions.
- Dissatisfaction theory helps us understand why districts may shift their policies or policy-making style. Such changes can be precipitated by 1) change in community values; 2) change in political participation; 3) change in school board member values; and, 4) changes in school district policy.
- Nationally, large urban districts that were dominated by political decision-making orientations performed more poorly on student achievement indicators than the few professional urban boards.

Board governance is fundamentally different in large school districts (25,000 or more students).

- Nationally, only two percent of the nation’s school systems are large school districts. In El Paso County there are three school districts that fit this large school district category, the El Paso Independent School District (ISD), the Ysleta ISD and the Socorro ISD, with fall 2002 student populations of 63,181, 46,763, and 30,057 respectively.
- The concerns of large school districts are often the ones that are portrayed as national crises. While funding, student achievement, special education, educational technology and teacher quality are fairly universal concerns of all school districts, large

school districts are more likely to confront more severe teacher shortages, problems of safety, student discipline, and substance abuse.

- Large districts also offer a wider range of educational alternatives, programs of reform, and site-based management and are much more likely than small districts to involve the community in decisions in some manner.
- In large school districts, board members are more educated and are generally older. Because the time demands for school board members in large districts are substantial, there are fewer professionals or businessmen and more educators, retirees, and homemakers.
- There is significantly more board training in large districts. In large districts there is more interest in training on board accountability.
- Elections in large school districts are more competitive and more expensive. The rate of incumbent defeat is low for all board member elections; however, long-term service on school boards is rare. School boards where board members are elected in single-member districts may also be more constituency-based. There is clearly a broader range of community political forces involved in large district school board elections, and this influences the inevitable balancing act of school boards to be representative and, at the same time, not overtly political.

Case studies point to some best practices.

- *The same board decision making process that leads a district to become fiscally cost-effective works for increasing academic success.* Boards maintained an intense focus on students' needs, were characterized by a spirit of cooperation, had prevention strategies in place to prevent academic slippage, and financial pitfalls and established a standard of excellence.
- In a case study of the Roanoke, Virginia schools, *establishing specific policies and goals regarding not only student performance, but also*

dropouts, produced improved academic results. As measured by student grade point average (GPA), mandatory tutoring conducted by certified teachers lead to significant academic improvement.

Superintendent selection is vital to the district's success.

- One of the board's most important responsibilities is to select and appoint a chief executive to whom responsibility for the administration of the organization is delegated

Board-Superintendent relations are critical.

- The history of board-superintendent relations has seen roles and power dynamics change over time.
- A strong local educational leadership team of school board and superintendent is essential to form a community vision for children, enlist community support for the vision, and to develop long-range plans and goals for raising student achievement and improve professional development. It requires that board members and superintendent develop the processes by which they will collaborate to establish sound policies and carry them out.
- The challenge to the leadership team is to create public engagement and mobilize the community to develop and update a vision and plan for the district's children. This challenge is one of engaging in long-range and on-going strategic planning for the school district.
- "An effective superintendent and board relationship was critical in creating a learning environment that established a climate of caring and high expectations for all students, support and trust, a strong system of communication, successful district wide initiatives and active and participative parental involvement."³

³ Flores, S.M. (2001). *The superintendent-board relationship and its role in the improvement of Hispanic student achievement in an exemplary rated school district in Texas*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.

- There is a connection between the quality of a board members' commitment to their governance responsibilities and the quality of their decision making on the board.

Role clarification is needed.

- *State laws and local policies make clear that school board member roles should focus on leadership and governance for high student achievement and not on administrative and financial details.*
- There is a need for clarity in the role definitions of the board and superintendent. School board members often fail to differentiate between the policy-making role of the school board and the administrative role of the superintendent. *When the board and superintendent understood and respected each one's role in district governance and administration, then they were able to set clearly defined roles for increasing student achievement.*
- Regular board work sessions on board and superintendent roles, as prescribed by state law, coupled with clear job descriptions and performance expectations for superintendents are seen as important actions to prevent the blurring of legislative/administrative lines and overstepping of boards into potential administrative micromanagement. Boards that establish clear performance expectations for the superintendent may lower conflict levels.
- When board-superintendent conflict escalates to the point that a superintendent is non-renewed, it is incumbent on boards to evaluate their responsibility for the superintendent turnover. The dynamics of superintendent turnover are such that boards that are not concerned about role clarification between the superintendent and themselves may be creating an environment that is less than favorable for future board-superintendent relations.

Training for board members appears to be a key.

- Developing written policies regarding orientation and training, especially for new board members, can improve school board leadership.
- Establishing congruency between "ideal" school board governance practices and actual board practices appears to improve with training.
- *Board members can not monitor what they do not understand.* Boards need to learn more about target setting for school improvement, how to structure reasonable and meaningful objectives and time lines.

Monitoring results matters.

- Establishing frequent, regular times for school boards to monitor student achievement results is important. Public hearings, regular monthly board information sessions and linking the budgeting process to performance goals are all ways boards can structure sessions to focus on school improvement.
- Benchmarking results to other school districts is critical. Boards need to see how their district is doing in comparison to other school districts as well as how individual schools within their own district are doing.
- Using site visits to assist board members in their monitoring role can be helpful if questions, process and procedures for classroom visits by individual board members are adopted by the board. These visits provide school personnel an opportunity to "paint a picture for them (boards) of how things are progressing and how successful their policies are."

Strategic planning offers a sound process to address increasing student achievement.

- *Strategic planning does not take the place of leadership; in fact, school board-superintendent leadership is essential for the successful conduct of strategic planning.* The goal is to remain focused on the district's core mission. It also can facilitate communication and participation of the broader community in the enterprise of public education and

- accommodate divergent interests and views.
- It involves initial agreement on the scope of the planning process, the identification of both internal and external stakeholders, and the clarification of the organization's mission, core values and mandates, legal and otherwise.
 - School district resources, the current strategy for achieving goals and the kinds of data that are normally generated to measure progress are all examined. In El Paso County much of this work has already been undertaken by the Collaborative for Academic Excellence, which for the past ten years has been assisting local districts in analyzing academic data and targeting local educational reform strategies.
 - By identifying strategic issues, the fundamental policy questions and critical challenges that affect the organization's mandates or mission, its service level, financing, organization or management can be addressed.
 - Strategic planning assists in 1) identifying the options and practical alternatives for resolving each strategic issue; 2) enumerating the barriers to achieving each alternative; and, 3) developing the major proposals or programs and resource allocations for achieving the alternatives selected. Effective strategies must meet some stiff criteria of dealing with the issue addressed, technical workability, political acceptability to key stakeholders and "fit" with the organization's mission and values. Once agreement on strategies has been reached, there is often an additional step of official approval and adoption by a governing board.

Are the circumstances in the particular organization right to undertake strategic planning?

- If the key leaders and decision makers support the process and it has been tailored to meet the specific needs of the organization, then the answer is yes.

- If the process is not tailored to the particular organization and if there is not enough support for the process among key leaders and decision makers, the answer is no. It is also not advisable to undertake strategic planning when the organization is in crisis.
- The purpose, preferred steps, form and timing of reports, the membership of the groups overseeing and participating in the process, the commitment of the necessary resources and any other boundaries on the process must be understood. The strategic planning process may produce agreement on viable strategies; however, the readiness or capacity to implement the plan may not be present.

What is the business perspective of a good board?

- *Good boards have active directors.* They participate in critical decision making on the choice of company strategies. However, they don't micro-manage. Board members should be completely independent of any ties to the company they supervise or to its CEO. They should also have a vested interest in the company, for example having every director own a significant amount of common stock in the company they supervise.
- *Board Independence and Leadership.* Independent directors meet periodically (at least once a year) alone, without the CEO or other non-independent directors, to discuss the company. In order to instill independent leadership, a good board has an independent director who acts in a lead capacity to coordinate the other independent directors. Additionally, certain board committees consist entirely of independent directors and no director may also serve as a consultant or service provider to the company.
- *Board Processes and Evaluation* includes self evaluation. Each board should establish performance criteria not only for itself (acting as a collective body) but also individual behavior expectations for its directors.

Minimally, these criteria should address the level of director: attendance, preparedness, participation and candor.

- *Diversity counts.* Having a mix of director characteristics, experiences, diverse perspectives and skills that are most appropriate for the company is helpful.
- *Effective boards establish performance criteria and compensation incentives for the CEO and regularly review the CEO's performance against those criteria.*

The taxpaying public and school boards should work together to decide "what" is to be offered, while professional educators should be empowered to decide "how" it should be accomplished.

- *Scarce resources must be directed to high priority initiatives.* Effective boards ask questions like: Are we doing our best to accomplish the really important tasks schools perform? Or are we treating everything as though it was of equal importance? It is folly for a business to try to be all things to all people.
- The superintendent has "three responsibilities: a) Defining the school's role and mission in terms the general public can understand, b) Establishing institutional objectives in terms school employees can understand, and c) Developing a strategy to achieve the goals and objectives in terms everyone can understand."⁴

Business perspectives can help in determining what the community and the school board value.

- *"It is common for managers to spend too much energy on how to run a race when they should be more concerned with choosing which race to run."* The premise of *The Discipline of Market Leaders* is that "an enterprise cannot be successful unless and until it

establishes which of (the) three value disciplines to follow."

- *Valuing operations leads to a minimum level of quality or performance at the very lowest level of cost.* This discipline offers the advantage of competitiveness in a resource lean environment. Schools practicing this discipline are uniquely equipped to make difficult resource allocation choices while preserving the core characteristics of their programs.
- Organizations that value *customer intimacy* "often become social institutions first and institutions of learning second." *Policy changes place teacher, parent, and community concerns foremost.*
- Organizations that choose *product leadership* are most concerned about *innovation that garners results and raises student achievement.* "Product oriented schools have the following attributes: a) funding is consistent and adequate; b) the student population is stable with few needing extraordinary services; and 3) the schools are driven by aggressive, results-oriented principals." Proponents of this model strive to offer customers the best and most advanced product.⁵

School board work is essential in providing leadership for student achievement.

- The National School Boards Association recommends that school boards focus on:
 - ✓ Creating the *vision* for student success.
 - ✓ *Establishing clear standards* for student performance, and ensuring that *student assessments* are tied to these standards
 - ✓ *Aligning district budgets* to ensure students meet the standards, and creating a *climate* that supports a philosophy that "all children can learn." *Building collaborative partnerships* with community political and business leaders.

⁴ Holcomb, J.H. (1989). Here's why public schools should use private-sector marketing strategies. *The American School Board Journal*: 34-37.

⁵ Treacy, M. and Wiersama, F. (1995). *The Discipline of Market Leaders*. Boston, MA: Addison Wesley.

- ✓ *Emphasizing continuous education and training.*
- ✓ *Placing strong emphasis on community involvement.*
- ✓ *Monitoring and evaluating school performance, one of the most difficult of school boards key roles.*
- The Texas State Board of Education (TSBOE) adopted a *governance framework* in 1996 to be used in structuring continuing education for school board members which addresses many of the areas delineated by the NSBA.

- significant relationship between school board group dynamics (professional, political or personal judgment) and school district performance.
- Importance of school superintendent characteristics, as well as the trait possession of superintendents would also be compared across academic quality measures

Does the quality/nature of school board member interactions or group dynamics have an effect on student performance?

- There is a need to examine the linkages in the influence/decision chain. In business research, organizational performance is typically examined at each level in the chain. *A weak link anywhere in the management chain could cause a performance shortfall.*
- By placing as much decision authority and responsibility at the lowest feasible level in complex organizations, *upper management has more time to spend on long-range planning and strategic issues because they are freed from routine decision-making and tactical implementation.*

Further research is needed to explore the connections between board policy formation, implementation and school district effectiveness. In order to address the scarcity of empirical evidence linking school board policymaking orientations and school district performance, the Institute for Policy and Economic Development proposes the following research agenda.

- School district academic performance quality would be assessed using an accepted quality indicator, such as Texas' Academic Indicator System (AEIS) data, which may be supplemented with other locally agreed upon quality indicators.
- School board group dynamics would be assessed through the use of Murdock's School Board Policy-Making Orientation Instrument to determine if there is a statistically

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EFFECTIVE BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL BOARDS: LINKING LOCAL GOVERNANCE WITH STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Christine Thurlow Brenner, Ph.D.
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INTRODUCTION

Presently we are in an era of high-stakes academic testing of students that focuses attention on classroom teachers' performance. Instructional leadership based on principles and factors built into the evaluation of the overall leadership of school superintendents raises the question of what is the role of the local school board. Do the actions, or non-actions, of school boards, a uniquely American school governance system, make a difference in the student achievement levels within their district?

Understanding the connection between school board policy decisions and measurable increases in student achievement would help inform the way independent school district boards approach their responsibilities. Additionally, understanding the relationship between an elected governance body and the professionally trained chief executive officer is important to provide greater clarity of responsibilities for student performance.

Education has always been an arena in which laypersons, whether parents, businesspersons or other citizens, have felt a great deal of latitude in offering their opinions. Since 1983 when the study, *A Nation at Risk*, was released chronicling the challenges facing the American education system, the public in its many roles has alternately criticized, cajoled and championed educational reform movements.¹ Behind the many initiatives that have emerged, including site-based management, technology-driven instruction, school-based health clinics, and "new" math, what has been consistent is the desire to find the ideal instructional milieu to help students succeed in school.

At the same time educators struggled to incorporate new ideas with time-tested successes, the profession embraced with fervor the belief that "all children can learn."

But increasing scrutiny from citizens, elected officials and the business community lead to legislative requirements for performance assessment. Indeed, Texas has been a leader in pushing for measurable assessment of student performance. The 1996 re-write of the Texas Education Code states that "the primary responsibility for implementing the state's system of public education and *ensuring student performance*" falls to the local school district or charter school.²

Beginning with House Bill 72 in 1984, which grew out of recommendations from a blue ribbon select committee on public education headed by Ross Perot, Texas has embraced a series of evolving assessment instruments aimed at measuring student academic success.³ But measuring student success on a single, high-stakes performance test is not the same as ensuring student performance. The emphasis placed on the testing by superintendents, principals and school boards and the significant efforts expended by students and educators to achieve successful test results have lead to accusations of "teaching to the test." Yet in an ideal educational environment, a testing instrument that is fully aligned with state-approved curriculum should garner results that reflect the student learning that has occurred in the classroom.

Adoption of the actual assessment instrument falls under the purview of the State Board of Education (SBOE). As the state-level elected governance body, the SBOE uses its rulemaking authority to "create and implement a statewide assessment program that is knowledge- and skills-based to ensure school accountability for student achievement."⁴ Furthermore, the Texas Education Code requires that the SBOE assessment instrument be criterion-referenced and designed to measure essential knowledge and

skills in readings, writing, mathematics, social studies and science.

The other criticism or question that has arisen around standardized performance assessment is whether it is a carrot or a stick. In Texas good results on student achievement tests, coupled with other factors such as student attendance levels, graduation and dropout rates and percent of students completing advanced courses, can lead to monetary and recognition rewards for outstanding individual schools and districts. A succession of low performing ratings can also result in state-level sanctions.

Instituted in 1990, the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for the State of Texas annually reports on the performance of students in each school and district in Texas.⁵ Since its inception, AEIS information has been made available at increasing levels of detail to allow parents, community members and legislators to view with greater specificity not only the performance of their local schools and districts, but how they compare to other schools and the state as a whole. Additionally, the report includes information on performance of specific groups of students, including those who are economically disadvantaged, students who receive special educational services and racial and ethnic minority students. The importance of this disaggregation (of data analysis) is that it assists educators in identifying areas in which students may need additional instruction and/or remediation, thereby allowing them to target their educational efforts.

Returning to the question of the role of the local school board, we can ask the questions: Given the increasingly data-driven system of measuring student achievement, are there models or best practices that boards can engage in that will ensure student performance? Does the business or non-profit arena offer insights that may assist school boards in carrying out of their responsibility to ensure student performance? This report explores these questions.

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2002 the El Paso Leadership Research Council (LRC) commissioned the Institute for Policy and Economic Development

at the University of Texas at El Paso to conduct a review of best practices for school boards and to evaluate whether best practices from the corporate and non-profit sector might be applicable to the governance of independent school districts in Texas. The LRC expressed particular interest in the question of whether there was a linkage between school board best practices and increased student achievement.

This process began with an academic literature review of governance practices of school boards, non-profit boards and corporate boards. The researchers anticipated finding quantitative research that would enlighten the discussion and provide guidance in developing a board best practices guide that would have a direct and positive impact on student achievement. *However empirical evidence linking school board practices with high levels of student achievement is so scant it is virtually non-existent.* This may be attributable to the fact that school board governance is not a salient area of research for most academics, whether administrative or educational leadership scholars, political scientists, or sociologists. Indeed most of the research on school boards is contained in unpublished doctoral dissertations, which have often been normative or prescriptive in nature.⁶

In light of this finding, this report will begin with an historical framework for understanding school board governance practices. Subsequently, a discussion of the roles of board members will be presented to determine what the local board's responsibility is vis-à-vis student academic performance. This will be followed by an examination of some of the current prescriptive suggestions for establishing an effective board role in improving student achievement. After exploring the educational perspective, lessons from the non-profit and corporate sector will be presented. Finally, the report concludes with investigatory suggestions for developing empirical data that may shed light on the linkage between board governance strategies and student achievement.

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

Local school boards are a distinctly American institution. The earliest instance of local school governance occurred when authority was delegated by the town council to a committee of local townsmen under Massachusetts School Ordinance of 1642.⁷ This appointed town school committee, functioning as a separate governing body, was responsible for the management oversight of the local schools. Following the democratic control model advocated by Samuel Adams, it evolved to an elected board with representatives selected from each of the 12 city wards.⁸ As urban districts became too large for the lay governance board to manage, superintendents were hired to manage the daily operation of schools. This initial role for the superintendent was one of clerk, who carried out the administrative duties of the district, enforcing the local board's regulations.⁹ Nationally, communities adopted this model of a separate local governance board accountable to the citizens to oversee public education. Rural areas were slower to adopt the use of superintendents, primarily because the tasks associated with district management were less burdensome in smaller districts.

School boards fell prey to the same forces of politicization and corruption that characterized ward politics during the late 1800s. As cries for governance reform surfaced during the Progressive era, lead primarily by middle class citizens and business leaders, local school boards were not immune. Lay boards by and large did not possess the qualifications necessary to carry out legislative, executive and administrative governance tasks concurrently. Leading educator Horace Mann advocated that employment of superintendents presented an opportunity to not only increase educational standards, but to diminish the political clout of elected board members.¹⁰ This push for increased efficiency and greater managerial capacity in the running of local schools lead to the emergence of the superintendent as a financial and business manager.¹¹

The stage was now set for competing expertise between the local school board, which was closest to the people, and the superintendent, representing the move towards modern business practices in the running of public schools. Helmlinger notes

that "issues such as educational qualifications and political agendas resulted in adversarial relationships" between the local board and the superintendent.¹² This debate raged between superintendents and local school board members. Cleveland Superintendent Drew Draper advocated a limited policy role for boards and independent powers for the superintendent and a strict separation of educational and business functions of the board. In response local school board member William George Bruce of Milwaukee decried the "Czarist movement" of superintendents while advocating for blurred legislative and executive functions of the local school board.¹³

Two leading academics, writing almost two decades apart, laid the foundation for modern school governance. Stanford education dean Cubberly, writing in 1916, called for small boards, elected at large and not from wards. Columbia education professor Strayer's 1938 work for the Education Policies Commission of the National Education Association and the American Association of School Boards supported Cubberly's position and emphasized that local school boards carry the full responsibility for local school districts. He recommended that the lay board function as the final authority on all school concerns. Functioning as legislative bodies that set school policy, local boards could turn executive administrative responsibility over to the superintendent.¹⁴

Also entering the mix was the creation of state boards of education. Initially local boards ceded some of their powers in order to facilitate statewide coordination of education, which was largely under-funded and clerical in nature.¹⁵ Locus of control issues between local school boards and the State Boards of Education (SBOE) became more problematic as the legislature expanded the role of the SBOEs over time. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, SBOEs exercised major influence over local education boards through their rulemaking authority in areas ranging from curriculum and delimiting textbook selection parameters to student performance assessment and teacher evaluations. These state mandates, which were frequently unfunded by the legislature, set the stage for conflicts between a centralized approach to education management and local control.¹⁶ More recently, in the State of Texas, the

legislature has curtailed some of the authority it had granted to the SBOE, driven largely by concerns of the conservative shift of the board largely influenced the religious right and perceptions of micromanagement via rulemaking of local school districts.

The ascendancy of modern day school board governance with the clear separation of school board governance from local partisan politics became well established. However, the tension between elected lay leadership and appointed professional educators (i.e. superintendents) ebbed and flowed in various communities. The emergence of the school superintendent as a highly educated professional administrator possessing skills and expertise that surpassed that of the local school boards shifted the balance of power in many communities.

Following the 1954 landmark Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, desegregating public schools and with the advent of the civil rights movement, the public's demand for more responsive governance and administration placed new challenges before local school boards. Parents, religious leaders, labor leaders and previously disenfranchised groups advocated for a more representative form of governance that would be closer to the people, forcing superintendents and boards to adopt a more inclusive managerial style, or face potential electoral defeat and potential dismissal. During this era the at-large election of local board members fell under scrutiny as arguments were made both in and out of court that this method diluted the voting strength of racial and ethnic minority group members. Critics argued that the needs of working class and racial and ethnic minority children would not be adequately addressed without electoral representation by board members who reflected that aspect of the community.¹⁷ Large, urban districts moved to the adoption of single member districts over the subsequent decades, sometimes on their own initiative and often as a result court decisions.

At the same time the elected composition of school boards was shifting to be more inclusive of the diversity of urban areas, new seeds of conflict were planted between those who advocated for large centrally controlled school districts and others who emphasized

the need for local control. Smaller, especially rural, districts resisted the centralization movement because of their desire to preserve the close relationship boards held with the community.¹⁸ Yet supporters touted the increased efficiencies of scale that would be realized through centralization of administrative functions such as purchasing, payroll and curriculum development.

Recognizing the importance of issues of local control, whether it means representing the diversity of communities or resisting the influence of the state capital, is central to understanding the governance dilemma school boards faced. Should they choose to follow the business model, which optimized operational efficiency or the community-based model, which emphasized local accountability? Initially school districts moved more in the direction of the business model, but the bureaucratization of urban districts characterized by snail's pace decision making through multiple management layers and remote disengaged boards left little doubt in the public's mind that local control needed to be more pre-eminent.

The decentralization reform movement that followed in the 1980s had as its cornerstone the establishment of site-based decision making in which school, or building, level committees comprised of parents, business and community members, teachers and an administrator discussed and provided input into the management of local schools.¹⁹ Proponents of grassroots community involvement felt this shift in governance, albeit advisory in nature, was critical to providing voice to working class and racial and ethnic minority communities and creating a higher level of responsiveness to unique local needs.²⁰ Empowered through this process, voters began to elect school board members who saw their role more as one of advocacy than trusteeship.

Concurrently, questions about *Why Johnny Can't Read*²¹ coupled with the frustrations of business employers and higher educational institutions about the skill base and competencies of high school graduates culminated in legislative action.²² The era of high-stakes academic assessment had arrived. Educators, administrators and school boards all came under fire when student

achievement levels were below community expectations. Moving beyond the finger pointing to broaden the engagement of the larger community became paramount if local boards and superintendents were to address the performance deficiencies. But this was more problematic for boards with a history of political infighting and adversarial relationships with school superintendents.

In 1989, the Texas Business and Education Coalition was formed to address on a statewide level the need for dialogue between business professionals and educators regarding the improvement of public education for all students. Local school boards were more uneven in their response to the involvement of the business community. While they gladly welcomed sponsorship of field trips, job shadowing opportunities and similar business partnerships, they were very sensitive about the sometimes-public condemnation of boards and/or administrators and educators for their inability to produce "competent" graduates. Clearly, defining the role of the board and superintendent in improving student achievement became critical to the goal of increased academic performance.

Texas itself has moved from testing for minimal competencies to assessments designed to focus on students' higher order thinking and problem solving skills.²³ Development of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum was adopted by the SBOE in 1997 with input from parents, business leaders, educators and school board trustees as the appropriate curriculum to prepare students for the 21st century high tech knowledge-based economy. Beginning in 2002, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS) test, which replaces the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), will be fully aligned with the curriculum (TEKS). Thus, results on this criterion-referenced test will provide benchmarks for how students are progressing academically during their public school years.

This state initiative dovetails with federal legislation in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, championed by President George W. Bush. Based on the principles that there should be stronger accountability for results and an emphasis on proven teaching

methods, the bill expanded options for parents while at the same time increasing flexibility and local control.

With the state and federal government as well as the business and higher education community uniting in the call for student performance accountability, local school boards and superintendents are feeling the pressure from all quarters. How then can the role of the local school board simultaneously lead and support the efforts of professional educators? Role conflicts within boards and between boards and superintendents provide one of the most challenging aspects of school district governance.²⁴ The following section examines the roles and perceptions of school boards in relation to policy, evaluation, personnel, goals, finances and communication. This is then contrasted with the roles of school superintendents.

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD

How Boards Formulate District Policy

School board members use a particular lens when they are formulating district policy, which varies based on the decision arena. The three policy orientations that can be observed are professional, political and personal judgments, as shown in Table 1 (p. 32). Boards embracing professional decision making styles tend to defer to the educational and administrative expertise of the superintendent, strive to seek consensus on issues often resulting in unanimous voting patterns on policy issues and, time and again, permit the professional administrators to implement the policies the board has adopted. They differ significantly in their approaches from boards, which have a political policy perspective. Political decision making boards are characterized by: split votes on policy issues; exhibit intense political bargaining among board members, the superintendent, and constituents; have a tendency to make policies without deferring to the superintendent; frequently yield to their represented constituency; and, are often closed to input that might impact the policy making decision.²⁵ Personal judgment enters into the decision making arena when we consider the actions of individual board members rather than the board as a corporate entity.²⁶

In two independent studies, Keller and Murdock²⁷ find that choice of policy making orientation is independent of variables such as district size, race, age, level of education and gender of the individual board member, as are presently having children in the schools, length of time served on the board and method of election. The decision arena, however, is a factor in determining policy-orientation. School board members tend to use a professional policy making approach in matters concerning curriculum and instruction while personal judgment drives decision making processes on financial and personnel issues.²⁸ This suggests that it is important to understand the personal values, attitudes and beliefs of individual board members as the public and business community seek to understand decisions made in a corporate setting regarding personnel and financial issues.

Iannaccone and Lutz's dissatisfaction theory identifies a number of shifts that may be occurring in a district that could lead to changes in policies and policy making styles of boards.²⁹ This includes: 1) change in community values; 2) change in political participation; 3) change in school board member values; and, 4) changes in school district policy. Notably when Johnson-Howard applied this framework in three case studies, she found that when political conflict and subsequent turnover in board membership occurred, board members moved from concerns about organizational efficiency to an emphasis on quality and choice. It should also be noted that the political values of the "insurgents" were different from either the incumbent board or the realigned board.³⁰ Likewise, Hunt finds that "citizen dissatisfaction with political man will prompt the use of the electoral process. Thus, democratic control enables civic man to initiate a chain of events that culminates with an adjustment of educational policy to reflect the community's new value orientation."³¹

School District Size and the Nature of Governance

Before examining school board best practices it is essential to recognize that *board governance is fundamentally different in large school districts*, those with 25,000 or more students. Medium and large school district boards have more policy concerns than small

districts and governance in large districts is more politicized. Both of these matters impinge on governance practices. The findings of a 2002 study commissioned by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) clarify a number of the differences in school boards by size of the student population.³² A stratified random sample of two thousand of the 14,890 school systems in the United States was surveyed on board characteristics and practices, with an unusually high 41 percent response rate. *Only two percent of the nation's school systems are large school districts.* In El Paso County there are three school districts that fit this large school district category, the El Paso Independent School District (ISD), the Ysleta ISD and the Socorro ISD, with fall 2002 student populations of 63,181, 46,763, and 30,057 respectively. The El Paso ISD is the seventh largest school district in Texas and 57th largest in the U.S. It is the largest employer in the county, with over 8,000 employees, and has 88 school campuses and a \$424 million budget. The Clint ISD would be considered a medium-size school district with 8,221 students. The other El Paso County school districts would be categorized as "small", less than 5,000 students: Canutillo (4,680 students); San Elizario ISD (3,698 students), Tornillo ISD (1,200 students), Anthony ISD (787 students), and Fabens ISD (730 students).

Policy Issues. According to the NSBA survey, the policy challenges that board members consider most pressing are common to small and large districts. *All size school district boards consider funding questions and student achievement to be central concerns.* School district emphasis on student achievement has grown significantly in the 1990s. Seventy-three percent of survey respondents reported that attention to achievement has increased during their board tenure. *Special education, educational technology and the quality of the district's teachers are also relatively universal policy issues for school boards.* Medium and large districts, however, face a range of other concerns that are simply less prevalent or non-existent in the vast majority of small school districts in the nation.

- Teacher shortages, student discipline and substance use, school safety, school choice and educational alternatives, and board-community

- engagement are more likely to be policy issues on the agenda of large districts. Many small school districts do not offer educational alternatives other than support for home schooling. High profile reform proposals are also less common in small districts.
- Two-thirds of large districts require site-based management committees at schools for parental and staff involvement compared to 40 percent of all school districts.
 - Large districts are more likely to have requirements that students pass a test to graduate. Such a test is required in 63.4 percent of large districts compared to 42.2 percent of all districts.
 - Large districts are much more likely than small districts to involve the community in decisions in some manner. Attempts to obtain community input on a full range of issues from student achievement to board performance, budgets, curricular questions and superintendent selection are more prevalent in large districts.
 - The concerns of large school districts are often the ones that are portrayed as national crises; many of these concerns do not exist in small districts. Many popular and media discussions of school district problems, such as school violence, teacher shortages and school choice, focus on concerns that exist mostly in large urban districts and, even then, they may not be at the top of the list of policy concerns in large districts. The popular portrayals of school district issues, therefore, do not match with reality for the vast majority of the nation's medium- and small-size school districts.

Board Service. The time demands for school board members in large districts are severe. According to the NSBA survey, the average time spent on board business for all survey respondents was 25 hours per month and the typical board holds about 22.9 meetings a year.

- *In large districts, however, a large number of board members report*

spending 20 hours or more per week on board business.

- Large district board members also serve on an average of 2.8 other community boards or committees compared to a mean of 1.89 community boards for all respondents.
- Most school board members receive no compensation for their service (two-thirds) and three-quarters earn little or nothing. Service in large districts is also generally unpaid although one quarter of large-district respondents earns \$10,000 or more per year.
- Only one-fifth of board members surveyed receive a per-meeting stipend.

Board Member Background and Training. Very few school board members in the United States have professional training in education. There is a long U.S. tradition of lay public school education governance and leadership. Eighty percent of school boards have between five and eight members and the term of service is four years in 90 percent of boards surveyed.

- In large school districts, board members are more educated and are generally older. In terms of background, there are fewer professionals or businessmen and more educators, retirees and homemakers. Over 50 percent of large-district survey respondents are educators, retirees, and homemakers compared to third of small-district respondents. Service on large-district boards is more a chosen vocation.
- The school board membership in large urban districts is much more ethnically and racially diverse than for all school boards; however, school boards in general are more heterogeneous than state legislatures or the U.S. Congress.
- Almost all school board members receive training in a wide range of board activities, especially on board roles and responsibilities; but, *there is significantly more board training in large districts*, especially on issues of community engagement and partnerships, student achievement,

- communications and strategic planning.
- Many state education laws set minimum requirements for topics and hours of school board training. Perhaps because of these requirements, few board members responding to the NSBA survey desired additional training, only 10 to 20 percent. Where additional training was desired, the subjects of most interest were student achievement and community engagement, with moderate interest in strategic planning and budgeting issues.
 - In large districts there is more interest in training on board accountability, i.e., on the questions of how to focus on achievement, systematic improvements and heightened state demands for improved performance.

Board Elections. Most school board members in the United States are elected (96.2 percent); the remainder is appointed. And 89 percent of survey respondents reported that elections are nonpartisan. School board candidates are not identified as members of political parties. Slightly less than half of the elections are held on the day of national or state elections (46.5 percent); a third of NSBA respondents indicated that school board elections are held on the day of mayoral or city council elections. In general voter participation rates for school board elections are low, 20 percent or less; however, there is higher turnout when school board elections are timed with higher stakes elections. Most school board races are low-cost or no cost. Three-quarters of school board members surveyed reported spending "\$1,000 or less" or "nothing" on their election campaign; and, most of the funds were personal or from family and friends.

- *Elections in large school districts are more competitive and more expensive.* Overall, 15.5 percent of NSBA survey respondents reported that school board elections are "very competitive"; however, 28.4 percent were reported as very competitive in large school districts.
- The rate of incumbent defeat is low for all board member elections; survey respondents reported that 47.4 percent of members running for

reelection between 1998 and 2001 were unseated, 49.4 percent in large districts.

- In large districts different sources are tapped in campaign fund raising. More than 60 percent of survey respondents in large districts reported collecting contributions from employee unions and from the business community, as well as using personal wealth and contributions from family and friends. The role of employee and business groups is more modest in medium-size school districts and largely nonexistent in small districts. *There is clearly a broader range of community political forces involved in large district school board elections and this influences the inevitable balancing act of school boards to be representative and, at the same time, not overtly political.*
- School boards where board members are elected in single-member districts may also be more constituency-based. In the El Paso and Ysleta school districts, board members are elected from single-member districts; in Socorro, five board members are elected from single-member districts and two are elected at-large. School board members in the remaining six county school districts are elected at-large where each board member represents the entire school district.
- *Long-term service on school boards is relatively rare.* The NSBA survey found that currently the mean years of service of board members is 6.7 years. Few board members serve for ten years or more. In light of the complexity of school board governance issues, the NSBA survey raises a concern for the long-term experience and institutional memory of board members. Many board members believe that it takes at least two years to learn the job of a school board member. In addition, less than half of board members surveyed responded that they would definitely seek another term; 22 percent said that they definitely would not. Only slightly higher percentages of school board members in large districts plan to seek another term, 49.5 percent

compared to 43.7 percent for all respondents.

In summary, large school districts constitute a very small majority of total school districts in the nation but their governance is much more complex politically and in terms of the policy issues that must be addressed. Funding questions and student achievement, as well as special education, educational technology and teacher quality are universal school district concerns; however, large school district boards are faced with an even broader array of issues. Large districts are more likely to offer a number of educational alternatives, undertake programs of reform, institute site-based management, and to encounter more severe problems recruiting teachers. They also spend much more time on community relations and on securing community input on decisions than small school districts. In addition, large school districts confront problems that are more intense in their urban and inner-city environments, substance use, safety questions and larger poverty and immigrant student populations.

Linking Policy making Styles with Student Performance

Although the literature specifically linking how school boards govern with student performance is thin, nonetheless, there is a substantial body of literature on the effective functioning of school boards. This literature examines the governance responsibilities of school boards and the complex challenges they face from funding to increasing student achievement on standardized tests. Initially it is important to recognize that not all school boards are the same. *Board characteristics that have an effect on board functioning and decision making vary with the size of the school district.*

In a study of 258 school districts in New York State, the relationship between school board policy making styles and student achievement was explored to see if district governance makes a difference in the academic success of pupils. Of the boards surveyed, approximately two-thirds exhibited professional and one-third political policy making styles. While Ikejaku found that professional districts, primarily on the standardized end-of-course examinations, observed small performance gains district

styles were correlated with the urban-rural nature of the districts. Large urban districts that were dominated by political decision making orientations performed more poorly on student achievement indicators than the few professional urban boards. Suburban and rural boards tended to embrace professional policy-orientations; however, only the rural districts demonstrated a positive correlation between professional boards and student performance, as the relationship was not statistically significant for suburban boards.³³

The importance of board members' personal judgment and what can be conceptualized as moral leadership is revealed in Weber's study of the balance between "educationally effective and fiscally efficient" school governance.³⁴ The key finding was that the same board decision making process that leads a district to become fiscally cost-effective works for increasing academic success. School board members tended to "make every decision as though each child and every dollar was their own." Additionally, boards that were successful in fiscal and educational efficiency and effectiveness and maintained an intense focus on students' needs, were characterized by a spirit of cooperation, had prevention strategies in place to prevent academic slippage and financial pitfalls and established a standard of excellence.³⁵

HOW THE BOARD ADDRESSES PERFORMANCE GAPS

Sample School Board Policies

Finding the linkage between board policies and student achievement can help identify specific actions boards could pursue to address performance gaps in a district. In a case study of the Roanoke, Virginia schools, establishing specific policies and goals regarding not only student performance, but also dropouts, produced improved academic results. Rather than focusing only on attendance as the primary factor affecting student dropout rates, the board policy also included guidance for students, teaching techniques, personnel and alternative education.³⁶ While this is a case study, the holistic approach to addressing a dropout problem provides a good model for school board policy development. An intrinsic component of the success was the feedback

loop on the policy outcomes provided by administrative staff.

Another school board policy that has been linked to increased student achievement targets students who voluntarily participate in extracurricular sports. Again, this is a case study analysis of a suburban school district with high levels of student extracurricular participation. The board implemented a policy which required students to receive tutoring by certified teachers, if they dropped below passing in core subjects. The thrice weekly sessions focused on reviews of information presented in class and instruction to assist students in completing short-term assignments. As measured by student grade point average (GPA), mandatory tutoring conducted by certified teachers lead to significant academic improvement.³⁷ This policy is similar to Texas' "no pass, no play" policy, which requires students to be passing all of their academic core courses in order to participate in extracurricular activities.

The Role of School Board/Superintendent Leadership Teams in Closing the Achievement Gap

The board-superintendent relationship is critical for effective school district governance and administration, and the literature on the need for the board members and superintendent to view themselves as part of a unified leadership team is extensive. School board members consider the selection and oversight of the district superintendent as perhaps their most important role. In evaluating the superintendent's performance, the factors that are most often emphasized are: the board-superintendent relationship, the morale of school system employees, the safety of students, and the management of school facilities.³⁸

A strong local educational leadership team of school board and superintendent is essential to form a community vision for children, enlist community support for the vision, and develop long-range plans and goals for raising student achievement, and improve professional development. *It requires that board members and superintendent develop the processes by which they will collaborate to establish sound policies and carry them out.*³⁹ This appears to be a "best practices" idea. If the school board and superintendent can achieve or have

forged a sound team-leadership relationship, all district governance and administration questions can be more effectively addressed and it is more likely that a cohesive focus on student achievement can be achieved.

Another recommendation of the National Advisory Committee on School Board/Superintendent Leadership, Governance, and Teamwork for High Student Achievement (NAC) is that school board/superintendent leadership teams must lead their communities in rethinking the educational vision to define student achievement as more than passing a standardized test.⁴⁰ The NAC cites the definition of student achievement in the NSBA report *Raising the Bar: a School Board Primer on Student Achievement* (1998) that proposes a definition of student achievement that includes:

1. Academic attainment reaching beyond what a state test or other standardized test currently measures (e.g., higher order thinking skills, intellectual curiosity and creativity)
2. Job skills and preparation
3. Citizenship (e.g., volunteerism, voting, community service, abiding by laws)
4. Appreciation of arts
5. Development of character and values (e.g., integrity, responsibility, courtesy, patriotism, and a work ethic).

Supporting the use of multiple indicators of student achievement, Davis' analysis of the linkage between school board policies and reducing the achievement gap that exists between black and white students in Ann Arbor, Michigan finds that a policy "that focuses only on an achievement gap may focus primary attention on reducing the gap rather than on increasing overall achievement levels of all students."⁴¹

Creating the Vision for High Achievement

The challenge to the leadership team is to create public engagement and mobilize the community to develop and update a vision and plan for the district's children. This challenge is one of engaging in long-range and on-going strategic planning for the school district.

The educational performance gap between racial and ethnic minority children and their Anglo peers is well documented. *Closing the Gap* is one of the primary goals of the Texas

Higher Education Coordinating Board as they seek to make higher education accessible and attainable for all students in the state.⁴² Flores' case study of an exemplary rated school district in Texas finds that "an effective superintendent and board relationship was critical in creating a learning environment that established a climate of caring and high expectations for all students, support and trust, a strong system of communication, successful district wide initiatives and active and participative parental involvement." Pivotal to raising the bar and providing the supports to allow all groups of students, including racial and ethnic minority and economically disadvantaged children to succeed, was clarity in the role definitions of the board and superintendent. When the board and superintendent understood and respected each one's role in district governance and administration, then they were able to set clearly defined roles for increasing student achievement.⁴³

BOARD ROLES: CLEAR OR IN CONFLICT?

Sound school board governance is possible where board members are clear on their most important roles and where the differences between board and management roles are clearly understood. Boards that achieve this clarity have learned to control the right things in the appropriate manner. The processes by which many boards govern have been handed down over decades; they are *traditional* governance behaviors and may involve board members in the minutia of management. The foremost tasks of boards are to first determine to whom and for what they are accountable, then, as a single body, define their expectations of themselves, their CEO, the board chair, and any committees. The board essentially sets the vision and the key policies for the organization. It then "unambiguously assigns the right to interpret and implement board policies" to individuals who can be held accountable.⁴⁴

John Carver and his associates are known world-wide for teaching the concepts and principles of *policy governance*. The Carver model of governance is based on ten principles.⁴⁵

1. The board of a public organization exists to represent the ownership of

the organization in the same way as a corporate board does. The *ownership group* is the entire community, e.g., school district. The board exists to represent this group, as a form of "civic trusteeship," and is responsible to them. *The board's primary relationship, therefore, is with the "owners" and not with staff.*

2. The board in exercising its strategic leadership speaks as a *body* with one voice or not at all. The power of board members is as a group, not as individuals; and, there is an obligation to reach a single, unambiguous position, despite legitimate diversity of opinion.
3. Board decisions should predominantly be *policy decisions*, in four categories: ends policies (benefits to accrue to students); executive limitations; governance process (rules the board sets for itself); and, board-staff linkage.
4. Boards should formulate policy beginnings with the broadest *values* before progressing to narrower, more detailed issues, until they reach the degree of detail that satisfies their need to be accountable.
5. Boards should define and delegate, rather than react to and ratify staff plans.
6. The careful determination of *ends policies* (what benefits to be produced, e.g., student learning, and at what cost) is the pivotal duty of board members.
7. The board's best control over staff operational matters (budgets, curricula, personnel policies, buildings and equipment, etc.) is to *limit* (identify the means not to be used), not to prescribe them.
8. The board must explicitly design its own governance process and products, how it will conduct itself and its own job.
9. Boards must establish a linkage with management (board-staff linkage policies) that balances executive effectiveness and board leadership responsibility (delegation, job products, performance evaluation, etc.).

10. Performance of the superintendent/CEO is monitored rigorously, but only against the policy criteria set by the board. The monitoring information is precise and targeted to the policy criteria.

Role Clarity Serves as an Inducement to School Board Service

The board-superintendent leadership team must also focus on attracting and retaining qualified school board members. The NAC believes that attracting citizens to serve on school boards requires that state laws and local policies make clear that school board member roles should focus on leadership and governance for high student achievement and not on administrative and financial details, as immediate as the concerns may be. It believes that school board members would be more interested in continuing to serve if more time were spent in board meetings on developing goals and policies for quality education.⁴⁶ Many public-spirited citizens who are interested in the challenges facing public schools and agree to serve on school boards may become discouraged by the range of detailed matters that school board members must address. However, there does appear to be a connection in the quality of a board member's commitment to their governance responsibilities and the quality of their decision making on the board.⁴⁷

A review of state laws should be conducted to assess how clearly they define the primary role of school boards as policy making and delineate the leadership role of the board-superintendent team and the executive and managerial role of the superintendent.⁴⁸ It is equally important to determine the extent to which state education laws support the board-superintendent leadership team with periodic training and evaluation of each team's joint work. This training and assessment needs to occur in a private setting and several times a year.

Developing written policies regarding orientation and training, especially for new board members, can improve school board leadership.⁴⁹ A 12-year longitudinal study of over 1,803 board members from across the United States, revealed that board members were frequently unsatisfied with the practices of their boards; however, after receiving

training they perceived themselves to have improved overall. Establishing congruency between "ideal" school board governance practices and actual board practices appears to improve with training.⁵⁰

In Texas, the State Board of Education has established requirements for school board member training. New board members are required to receive a local district orientation soon after their election as well as a three hour orientation to the Texas Education Code, which is provided by the Education Service Center. Each year the entire board is required to participate in at least three hours of team-building and to assess the continuing education needs of the board-superintendent team. Continuing education hours based on the Framework for School Board Development and local needs assessment should include at least ten hours for new board members and at least five hours per year thereafter.⁵¹

Role Conflict Undermines Achieving the District Mission

Although the historical development of the relationship between school boards and superintendents has been fraught with changing power relationships, boards that establish clear performance expectations for the superintendent may lower conflict levels.⁵² Superintendents also need to be cognizant that the increasingly technological metaphors and jargon used by professional educators can contribute to individual and collective communication breakdowns.⁵³ Superintendents who provide their board with plentiful information on important issues and who are able to maintain consensus among district administrators and educators are more likely to influence board decision making.⁵⁴

Barger identified three major conflict areas in his study of Indiana school boards. They are:

1. School board members fail to differentiate between the policy making role of the school board and the administrative role of the superintendent.
2. School board members and superintendents are not consistent with respect to perceptions of initial board member involvement.
3. School board members and superintendents in different sized school corporations (*districts*)

disagree concerning perceptions of the kind and amount of initial board member assumptions of responsibilities.⁵⁵

In the instance that board-superintendent relations collapse, resulting in involuntary separation of a superintendent from his or her district, it is incumbent on boards to evaluate their responsibility for the superintendent turnover. Boards are reluctant to do this. Whether it is a denial of the political nature of educational organizations, or naiveté about the impact of community dynamics on superintendent turnover, boards that are not concerned about role clarification between the superintendent and themselves may be creating an environment that is less than favorable for future board-superintendent relations.⁵⁶ Indeed, Poole finds that superintendents are more concerned about role clarification than boards.⁵⁷

Regular board work sessions on board and superintendent roles, as prescribed by state law, coupled with clear job descriptions and performance expectations for superintendents are seen as important actions to prevent the blurring of legislative/administrative lines and overstepping of boards into potential administrative micromanagement.⁵⁸ In particular, boards need to understand their roles in policy planning, policy development and policy evaluation. The need for further research on the effects of written policies on actual board practices is indicated.

However, a contradictory finding by Venema, who surveyed 126 school boards in Pennsylvania, indicated there was no statistically significant difference between boards that high or low levels of turnover of superintendents regarding: 1) the existence of written policies defining the board and superintendent roles; 2) the existence of an annual written superintendent performance evaluation; 3) the turnover rate of board members; or, 4) providing orientation programs for board members.⁵⁹ Rather than rejecting the importance of written policies and personnel evaluations, Venema's work suggests that further research is needed to explore the connections between board policy formation, implementation and effectiveness. Certainly other external factors, such as parent, business, and taxpayer concerns about superintendent effectiveness coupled

with the observed level of board-superintendent conflict may also play into the mix. Levels of taxation did differ significantly between high and low turnover boards, and may present another area for further research.

The School Board Monitoring and Evaluation Role: Lessons from the United Kingdom

Peter Earley cites a body of research from England on the performance monitoring role of school boards.⁶⁰ The U.K. research found that most school board members consider the monitoring and evaluation of school performance to be one of the most difficult of their key roles. Key board roles he describes as providing a strategic view, acting as a critical friend to the school and ensuring accountability. It is easier for school board members to monitor finances and physical plant than to monitor student performance and programs. This is because the monitoring and evaluation role is essentially looking into "learning", i.e., the curriculum and its delivery, and school board members are more likely to view this as the responsibility of professional educators. Some board members doubt their skills and knowledge to evaluate "learning" or they consider it a state responsibility. They may also view pedagogy as a secret or esoteric language and entrust the superintendent and professional staff with the task. Some of the other challenges of the monitoring role are:

- Deciding on the key indicators to monitor and evaluate. How can the school's effectiveness in helping students to achieve at the highest levels possible be measured? Both good data and sound analysis are needed in order to form judgments on the worth of various programs and activities.
- Who will provide the data collection and when?

Board members cannot monitor what they do not understand. They need an appropriate level of information and Earley goes on to describe U.K. experience in monitoring curriculum and standards of pupil work. A common monitoring activity is for school board members to look at test and examination results and listen to professionals' interpretations of the results. This often involves benchmarking results to other school

districts. In the U.K. experiences discussed, school boards also established curriculum committees that operate under guidelines approved by the full board with superintendent input. The committee members visited schools several times a year with an agreed upon set of questions in order to study “high focus” curriculum areas. The questions, process, and procedures for classroom visits were approved by the board. The purpose of the visits was to meet with and receive presentations from curriculum coordinators and lead teachers and to, in effect, have school personnel “paint a picture for them of how things are progressing and how successful their policies are.” Lead teachers were given a half-day off for the visit. In the experience described, the fact of the visits was seen as a form of monitoring; and superintendents and principals viewed the visits as a way to both thank teachers for their efforts and keep them on their toes. The findings of the visits were reported to the full board. In examples from other schools, school board members were a part of monitoring team made up of some combination of school board members, senior staff, teachers, parents, pupils and advisors⁶¹

Board members also need to be informed of the various systems of monitoring and evaluation that are being used throughout the school district and whether they are effective. In another example discussed by Earley, board members participated with students in an evaluation of a particular monitoring instrument, “pupil records of achievement,” and whether they were useful instruments.⁶² One of the next challenges for school board members is to learn more about target setting for school improvement, how to structure reasonable and meaningful objectives and time lines.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE SCHOOL DISTRICT EFFICIENCY AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Strategic planning processes and tools were adopted in the corporate world earlier than in the public sector and date from the 1960s; however, they have been widely adopted in the governmental and non-profit sector since the early 1980s. Although the terms used to describe business strategic planning, e.g., clients and customers, competitors, firm inputs, transformation processes and outputs,

may seem quite distinct, the purposes of engaging in the process are similar. All organizations operate in an environment of constant change in social, political, financial and technological circumstances. They often need new or revised strategies in order to cope with changing demands and mandates, sometimes even to insure organizational survival. In the case of school districts, the challenges may be changing demographics, growth in the school age population, the need for new facilities, or meeting state mandates and “quality of education” goals in light of low growth in property tax revenues and state deficits that portend cutbacks in state aid. In addition, the changes that a public organization faces are often aggravated by the increased *interconnectedness* of the world. Many public problems are the shared responsibility of several public and private organizations and, in the case of public, K-12 education, have direct links to employment, economic development and higher education issues. Representatives from each of these sectors are vitally interested in the success of public schools in their community.

Strategic planning is a set of concepts and tools designed to assist organizations to develop effective strategies to fulfill their missions, meet mandates and satisfy their constituencies in the long term. It is a “disciplined effort to produce the fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, why it does it” – for both leaders and followers.⁶³ Strategic planning does not take the place of leadership; in fact, school board-superintendent leadership is essential for the successful conduct of strategic planning. At its best, however, it can assist an organization and its wider community of stakeholders to think and act strategically to enhance performance and remain focused on the core mission.

Strategic planning is, therefore, a process to develop new strategies to cope with change. It involves broad information gathering, exploration of strategic alternatives and it emphasizes the future implications of present decisions. It can improve organizational learning, clarify future direction and establish priorities for action. In its many successful examples, it also can facilitate communication

and participation of the broader community in the enterprise of public education and accommodate divergent interests and views. In the nuts and bolts of the process, which can begin at a number of points, it involves initial agreement on the scope of the planning process, the identification of both internal and external stakeholders, and the clarification of the organization's mission, core values and mandates, legal and otherwise (see Figure 1, p. 33).

These steps are followed by extensive exploration of the external and internal environments of the organization. Figure 1 outlines the sources of *opportunities and threats* in the external environment and *strengths and weaknesses* in the internal environment, in this case, the school system itself. School district resources, the current strategy for achieving goals and the kinds of data that are normally generated to measure progress are all examined. In fact, good data on both the external and internal environment make a great difference in planning and need to be used at every step in the strategic planning process to help make decisions. This entire step of *scanning* the external and internal environment is commonly referred to as SWOT analysis, the acronym for the examination of *strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats*, although some prefer to use other terms such as opportunities and 'barriers.'

The next step in the process is the identification of strategic issues, the fundamental policy questions and critical challenges that affect the organization's mandates or mission, its service level, financing, organization, or management. Strategic issues are those that must be dealt with if the organization is to prosper. Frequently strategic issues involve conflict of some kind over ends, means, who benefits, etc. Statements of strategic issues should succinctly frame the question, list the factors that make it a fundamental challenge and state the consequences of failing to address the issue. An example of a strategic issue might be how to best support and integrate limited English proficiency (LEP) students in the school district or, for higher education, how to support adult and re-entry students.

The final planning step is to formulate the actual strategies and plans to manage the issues identified. There are a number of approaches to strategy development; nevertheless, they all involve: 1) identifying the options and practical alternatives for resolving each strategic issue; 2) enumerating the barriers to achieving each alternative; and, 3) developing the major proposals or programs and resource allocations for achieving the alternatives selected. A considerable amount of dialogue and negotiation among key decision makers is often required to select effective strategies. This is because effective strategies must meet some stiff criteria of: dealing with the issue addressed; technical workability; political acceptability to key stakeholders; and, "fit" with the organization's mission and values. Once agreement on strategies had been reached, there is often an additional step of official approval and adoption by a governing board, and, perhaps, by a network of community organizations that will participate in a program.

The strategic planning process concludes with steps that are essentially management aspects of the planning cycle: translating the strategies into an organization vision of success (this step may have been taken at an earlier point in the process); developing an implementation plan which assigns specific responsibilities, objectives and action steps; and, at a specified future point, reassessing the strategies and their success. As in the planning process, outside or specially-trained internal facilitators can assist in the development of action plans and objectives and with establishing milestones, timetables and accountability procedures.

Strategic planning in its critical details

In the case of school boards, if strategies are to be developed for improved student academic achievement and supported by the community, there are a number of critical details to consider. One of these early considerations is a determination of whether the circumstances in the particular organization are right to undertake strategic planning. The benefits of strategic planning, and they can be significant, will not be achieved if the process is not tailored to the particular organization and if there is not enough support for the process among key leaders and decision makers. It is important

that there be a dominant coalition of organizational leaders willing to sponsor and champion the strategic planning process. If this commitment and support to produce a good plan is not present, the time invested in strategic planning may be wasted. It is also not advisable to undertake strategic planning when the organization is in crisis, such as when hiring a new administrator or dealing with legal or financial difficulties, or when it normally experiences great difficulty reaching decisions. Some problems are best dealt with before embarking on a strategic planning process, although pieces of the process can still be useful to school boards and administration. There are also some instances when the strategic planning process may produce agreement on viable strategies; however, the readiness or capacity to implement the plan is not present. To undertake strategic planning in this environment would discredit the process and discourage the participants. The primary requirement for a successful process, however, is a dominant coalition that will sponsor and follow the process through to completion.⁶⁴

A second key aspect of successful strategic planning is the initial agreement on the process. This agreement should clarify for the participants: the purpose, preferred steps, form and timing of reports, the membership of the groups overseeing and participating in the process, the commitment of the necessary resources and any other boundaries on the process. The organizers-initiators of the process must negotiate agreement among key internal and possibly external decision makers on these details of the overall strategic planning effort. This initial agreement even requires some stakeholder analysis, a very valuable effort. Some strategic planning facilitators are of the opinion that, of the activities that can be most beneficial to the process, a well-done stakeholder analysis is at the top of the list.

Finally, organizations that are committed to a strategic planning process with realistic outcomes that can be implemented often hire professional facilitators to mentor the planning process or key parts of the process. In public education circles, in state agencies and national organizations, there are many recognized individuals and firms that offer

these services. Other organizations hire an outside facilitator and, at the same time, designate a key administrator and administrative team with the responsibility of overseeing the steps in the process and the participation of outside stakeholders. Many professional facilitation firms also train facilitators for organizations. The initial steps in the process can be accomplished in a two or three day retreat, with follow-up in a few weeks and the whole process may be timed for completion in four to six months. The internal facilitator(s) are also frequently responsible for the data gathering and leading the groups that work on action steps following strategy formulation.

Strategic planning facilitators play several key roles. They often assist in identifying and training a small team of advocates for the process within the organization. They train the team in the language and process of strategic planning and help to identify data that needs to be available at each step. They can lead the critical sessions on mission and values clarification and provide a toolbox of decision making skills that help participants to find their way through the process. As outsiders, they often equalize teams and see that the input of all participants is valued. They insure that evaluation and assessment take place at appropriate points.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE FROM THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE

The practice of strategic planning in the governmental and non-profit sector discussed in the previous section drew on earlier experience and research in the corporate world. It has been tailored over recent decades to the distinct challenges of strategic planning in the public sector. The next section of this report looks directly at best practices for the functioning of corporate boards and lessons that may be applicable to school boards. The section looks first at recent literature on the principle roles of corporate boards and then at guidelines for sound corporate governance. The recommendations for periodic board self-examinations of its own governance processes and the development of criteria for evaluation of these processes are of particular interest.

Following the review of corporate board roles and governance practices, the section considers John H. Holcomb's views on what school boards can learn from modern marketing practices and the importance of boards choosing a *value discipline* to pursue.

U.S. Corporate Governance Principles

This section presents current thinking on the roles and performance of corporate boards of directors. To this end, we have consulted leading university textbooks in management, business trade publications, and the World Wide Web to capture diverse points of view.

All sources agree that boards of directors are very important entities in the corporate world. Board member skill sets, independence from the President/CEO, duties/responsibilities, and performance evaluation are hot issues in the management field.

Corporate boards are being examined to identify best practices. If a set of best practices can be identified, some practices of good corporate boards may be transferable to local school boards. If so, it is hoped that there will be salutary effects on student academic performance.

Brenda Hanlon in *In Boards We Trust*⁶⁵ proposes specific roles for profit/non-profit boards of directors:

1. Provide continuity for the organization by setting up a corporate or legal existence.
2. Select and appoint a chief executive to whom responsibility for the administration of the organization is delegated.

Review the chief executive's performance regularly based upon a specific job description, including his relations with the board, his leadership in the organization, his program planning and implementation, and his management of the organization and its personnel. Offer administrative guidance regarding retention or dismissal of the chief executive.

3. Govern the organization by broad policies and objectives, formulated and agreed upon by the chief executive and employees to include assigning priorities and monitoring the

organization's work to ensure that programs are implemented.

4. Acquire sufficient resources for the organization's operations and to finance the products and services adequately.
5. Account to the public for the products and services of the organization and expenditures of its funds, including:

To provide for fiscal accountability, approve the budget, and formulate policies related to contracts from public or private resources. To accept responsibility for all conditions and policies attached to new, innovative, or experimental programs.

BoardSource, in their booklet *Ten Basic Responsibilities of Non-Profit Boards*, enumerates ten key responsibilities of the non-profit board of directors.⁶⁶ These are:

1. Determine the organization's mission and purpose.
2. Select the executive.
3. Support the executive and review his or her performance.
4. Ensure effective organizational planning.
5. Ensure adequate resources.
6. Manage resources effectively.
7. Determine and monitor the organization's programs and services.
8. Enhance the organization's public image.
9. Serve as a court of appeal.
10. Assess its own performance.

Business Week magazine has conducted annual surveys of the most and least effective corporate boards of directors in the United States. In 1997 (December 8), after a few years of conducting these rating surveys, the editors concluded that the best corporate boards tend to have a short list of things in common:

1. Most importantly, good boards have active directors. They participate in critical decision making on the choice of company strategies. However, they don't micro-manage. The editors believe there is a real difference between participating in strategy formulation and co-opting the CEO's implementation role.
2. Corporate governance experts strongly feel that board members

- should be completely independent of any ties to the company they supervise or to its CEO. This precludes a consulting relationship and any type of interlocking directorate arrangement between a director and the CEO.
3. One of the best indicators of a good board is when every director owns a significant amount of common stock in the company they supervise. This promotes a strong identity with shareholders, rather than management, encouraging a balanced view.

A December 8, 1997 *Business Week* article titled, "Directors in the Hot Seat," states that activists are increasingly targeting individual board members and challenging their job performance. Specifically, activists are criticizing behaviors they believe are inconsistent with shareholder interests:

1. Membership on too many boards.
2. Obvious conflicts of interest with management.
3. Missing excessive numbers of board or committee meetings.
4. Owning little or no common stock in the company they direct.

In this climate, it should come as no surprise that advocacy groups are calling for changes in the way corporations handle their boards of directors. Mutual fund companies and pension plans have been at the forefront of the drive to make corporate boards more accountable to shareholder interests. CalPERS and TIAA-CREF, representing the pension interests of California public employees and college educators, respectively, have articulated policies for effective board construction and conduct. These principles are consistent with the materials reviewed earlier; however, their expectations for board performance are much more elaborately stated which makes them useful for the purposes of this study. The CalPERS guidelines are presented here. These have received widespread attention and are an effective starting point as we look to determine the potential for transferring corporate board best practices to the school board setting.

The CalPERS Criteria For Rating Corporate Boards (April 13, 1998) – California Public Employees Retirement System

Core Principles

A. Board Independence and Leadership.
CalPERS suggests-

1. A substantial majority of the board consists of directors who are independent.
2. Independent directors meet periodically (at least once a year) alone, without the CEO or other non-independent directors.

To instill independent leadership, CalPERS suggests-

3. When the chair of the board also serves as the company's CEO, the board designates – formally or informally – an independent director who acts in a lead capacity to coordinate the other independent directors.
4. Certain board committees consist entirely of independent directors. These include committees who perform the following functions:
 - a. Audit
 - b. Director nomination
 - c. Board evaluation and governance
 - d. CEO evaluation and management compensation
 - e. Compliance and ethics.

To avoid conflicts of interest, CalPERS suggests-

5. No director may also serve as a consultant or service provider to the company.
6. Director compensation is a combination of cash and stock in the company. The stock component is a significant portion of the total compensation.

B. Board Processes and Evaluation

CalPERS suggests the following elements of self evaluation-

1. The board has adopted a written statement of its own governance principles and regularly reevaluates them.
2. With each director nomination recommendation, the board considers the mix of director characteristics, experiences, diverse perspectives and

- skills that is most appropriate for the company.
3. The board establishes performance criteria for itself and periodically reviews board performance against those criteria.
 4. The independent directors establish performance criteria and compensation incentives for the CEO and regularly review the CEO's performance against those criteria. The independent directors have access to advisors on this subject who are independent of management. Minimally, the criteria ensure that the CEO's interests are aligned with the long-term interests of shareowners, that the CEO is evaluated against comparable peer groups and that a significant proportion of the CEO's total compensation is at risk.
- C. Individual Director Characteristics
1. The board has adopted guidelines that address the competing time commitments that are faced when director candidates serve on multiple boards. These guidelines are published annually in the company's proxy statement.

Governance Guidelines

- A. Board independence and leadership
1. Corporate directors, managers and shareowners should come together to agree upon a uniform definition of "independence." Until this uniformity is achieved each corporation should publish in their proxy statement the definition adopted or relied upon by its board.
 2. With each director nomination recommendation, the board should consider the issue of continuing director tenure and take steps as may be appropriate to ensure that the board maintains openness to new ideas and a willingness to critically re-examine the status quo.
 3. When selecting a new CEO, boards should re-examine the traditional combination of the "chief executive" and "chairman" positions.
- B. Board processes and evaluation
4. The board should have in place an effective CEO succession plan and receive periodic reports from

- management on the development of other members of senior management.
5. All directors should have access to senior management. However, the CEO, chair or lead independent director may be designated as liaison between management and directors to ensure that the role between board oversight and management operations is respected.
 6. The board should periodically review its own size and determine the size that is most effective toward future operations.
- C. Individual director characteristics
1. Each board should establish performance criteria not only for itself (acting as a collective body) but also individual behavior expectations for its directors. Minimally, these criteria should address the level of director: attendance, preparedness, participation, and candor.
 2. To be re-nominated, directors must satisfactorily perform based on the established criteria. Re-nomination on any other basis should neither be expected nor guaranteed.
 3. Generally, a company's retiring CEO should not continue to serve as a director on the board.
 4. The board should establish and make available to shareowners the skill sets that it seeks from director candidates. Minimally, these core competencies should address: accounting or finance; international markets; business or management experience; industry knowledge; customer-base experience or perspective; crisis response; or, leadership or strategic planning.

Some Lessons From Strategic Management And Marketing

According to John H. Holcomb, "education has much to learn from modern business marketing practices and even more to put to use."⁶⁷ School boards would be wise to consider the following points as they set their strategic direction.

Education is a business. Like for-profit corporations, "school systems suffer from labor problems, communication breakdowns

and cash flow woes. They project costs, track demographics, estimate future needs and mount public relations efforts." Today, even small school districts grapple with concerns faced by large business including human resource policy and government regulation.

Like other businesses, schools must have an identifiable, quantifiable product if they are to be successful. "Even life-long educators are hard pressed to provide an answer when asked what is their product." School administrators answer to many stakeholder groups (legislators, media, and advocacy groups) each desiring a different focus to the education product. Consequently, program offerings have escalated. A Tarleton State University review showed that almost 50 percent of the current program offered at surveyed high schools didn't even exist 25 years earlier. Does course proliferation indicate an improved product or "a product out of control?" Holcomb suggests school boards and administrators "ask themselves three questions: a) what are we doing?; b) Why are we doing it?; and, c) could we do it better? And, he states, a fourth question, "should we be doing it at all? is imperative when it comes to schools."

The producer alone cannot define a school's product - the consumer must figure into the equation. Holcomb maintains that the taxpaying public and school boards should work together to decide "what" is to be offered, while professional educators should be empowered to decide "how" it should be accomplished. The people who use the education product must be encouraged to gather together and decide a vision for their schools which might read something like this: "Our schools must do these few things, even if they do nothing else."

The school team, led by the superintendent and the board, must develop definable, measurable, concrete objectives for delivering the agreed-upon product. Education parallels business in that the superintendent must set a direction for the organization; just as a President/CEO does in the corporate world. Both are responsible to boards for performance on goals, but each should be given free reign on the methods of accomplishing the agreed-upon goals. The superintendent has "three responsibilities: a)

defining the school's role and mission in terms the general public can understand; b) establishing institutional objectives in terms school employees can understand; and, c) developing a strategy to achieve the goals and objectives in terms everyone can understand." Just like a President/CEO, a good school superintendent "takes ultimate goals, makes them concrete, and then applies the resources to make the whole thing happen. To be held accountable, he must have considerable freedom in making decisions that affect the day to day operation of the institution."

Educators must learn that sometimes it is necessary to drop something from the product line if the company is to survive. Scarce resources must be directed to high priority initiatives. Other desirable, but less crucial initiatives must be cut back, curtailed or diverted to other entities such as families, churches, and social programs. This is vital to ensure satisfaction of critical goals in a resource-limited environment. According to Holcomb, "a marketing approach requires school leaders to ask themselves: Are we doing our best to accomplish the really important tasks schools perform? Or are we treating everything as though it was of equal importance? Do teachers and administrators know what the board and the community believe is important? Do we back our philosophy with budgets and policies that support those important tasks, spending less time and money on items of lesser importance?"

Holcomb presents thought provoking commentary on school board leadership responsibilities and makes an articulate case for strong parallels between the strategic decision making processes employed in the private sector and in public education. Building upon this theme, the next article by Gary M. Chesley and Janice M. Jordan⁶⁸ (1996, pp. 39-40) presents a practical strategic management paradigm that can be used to define a vision and goals for public education. This article presents and utilizes the strategic management framework of Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersama from their best-selling management guide, *The Discipline of Market Leaders*, published in 1995.⁶⁹

Simply stated, Treacy and Wiersama's premise is that it is folly for a business to try to

be all things to all people. While most managers readily accept this idea, many have a difficult time managing their businesses to avoid falling into the trap. Carried to an extreme, this poorly focused management approach can make a business mediocre and non-competitive in each market it serves. The same risks apply to the education market. The authors state that “it is common for managers to spend too much energy on how to run a race when they should be more concerned with choosing which race to run.”⁷⁰ Treacy and Wiersama present three value disciplines which they believe are at the heart of every strategic management decision. It is the choice of one of these three disciplines that determines the success potential of a business organization. Chesley and Jordan’s unique contribution is to illustrate the applicability of these value orientations to the school setting. The three value orientations are discussed below.

Valuing Operations

Organizations electing to value Operational Leadership strive to provide a minimum level of quality or performance at the very lowest level of cost. Tight budget control, cost cutting, and a bare-bones philosophy are hallmarks of this value orientation. A school district practices this approach when tax revenues and expenditures are the major management priorities. According to the authors, “operationally driven schools emphasize the most cost-efficient bids for instructional and maintenance supplies. Teacher materials are standardized and often textbook driven, and a strong, proven, and efficient curriculum is in place district-wide. Hiring decisions are based on cost factors instead of teacher experience and advanced preparation. Teacher training focuses on minimum standards set by government agencies. Programs of study offer limited academic choices and extracurricular offerings are lean. Getting by with a seemingly respectable product and making ends meet define the educational culture of this discipline. Consequently, there isn’t much room for innovation.”⁷¹

Although not glamorous, this discipline offers the advantage of competitiveness in a resource lean environment. Schools practicing this discipline are uniquely equipped to make difficult resource allocation choices

while preserving the core characteristics of their programs.

Valuing the Customer

Customer Intimacy is another of the value orientations advanced by Treacy and Wiersama. This strategy takes a segmentation approach by selecting a market niche with unique needs which match well the distinctive competencies of the business. Once a customer intimate firm decides upon its niche, every effort is made to become fully knowledgeable about the needs of the client firm. In so doing, a deep and lasting partnership is developed where the firm becomes an extension of the client and endeavors to identify all problem areas, including those not yet recognized by the client, and proposes comprehensive solution systems for them. The more intertwined the firm becomes with its client, the more indispensable it becomes creating new business opportunities and very strong customer loyalty.

Schools practicing the Customer Intimacy model “often become social institutions first and institutions of learning second.”⁷² Such schools try to address the total developmental needs of the child, making up for deficiencies in other aspects of a child’s life owing to family and economic difficulties. Interventions might include team teaching, block scheduling, and regular student counseling sessions. “Educators see intimacy as a way of leveling the playing field by creating programs that place social mandates on a parity with educational needs.”⁷³ Policy changes place teacher, parent and community concerns foremost.

Valuing the Product

The “third value proposition is Product Leadership which pushes the envelope to redefine excellence.”⁷⁴ Essentially, proponents of this model strive to offer customers the best and most advanced product. “Schools that commit to the Product Leadership proposition are most concerned about innovation that garners results and raises student achievement.”⁷⁵ Successful “Product Oriented schools have the following attributes: a) Funding is consistent and adequate so that day to day decisions are not constrained by fiscal crises, b) The student population is stable with few needing

extraordinary services, and 3) The schools are driven by aggressive, results-oriented principals.” In these schools, we find innovative curriculum and outcomes like “high test scores, high college acceptance rates and large numbers of merit scholars as measures of institutional success.”⁷⁶

The premise of *The Discipline of Market Leaders* is that “an enterprise cannot be successful unless and until it establishes which of the three value disciplines to follow (Operational Leadership, Customer Intimacy, or Product Leadership).”⁷⁷ The selection of a particular discipline should reflect the best opportunities available. In resource limited settings, Operational Leadership may be the sound choice in areas where there are many unmet needs and the organization has the skills and funding to pursue solutions. Customer Intimacy may be a good choice and Product Leadership can be a good choice if financial constraints are not a problem and the organization truly has the distinctive competencies to deliver product excellence.

LESSONS FROM THE NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARD ASSOCIATION AND THE TEXAS BOARD OF EDUCATION

Prescriptions/Frameworks for School Boards in Making Student Achievement a Top Priority

The National School Boards Association (NSBA), the Texas State Board of Education (TSBOE) and the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) have all developed guidelines and *prescriptive* pieces on the key tasks of school board members. The NSBA guidelines focus on school board *work* that is essential in providing leadership for student achievement. The TSBOE adopted guidelines in 1996 to be used in structuring continuing education for school board members; they identify critical areas for professional development that also generally focus on enhanced student achievement. Both statements speak to the important role of school boards in establishing a strong vision for student achievement, as well as to their involvement in determining the standards to be set, how assessment will be conducted and responsibilities for community involvement and ensuring accountability and progress toward district goals. Thus, both statements lay out steps and activities that are

a part of a strategic planning process as earlier discussed in this report, although neither document directly mentions comprehensive strategic planning.

The NSBA statement, as shown in Figure 2, delineates the *key work* that school boards interested in making students a top priority must undertake.⁷⁸ The school board must focus on *vision*, creating the district and community consensus on achievement objectives, *establishing clear standards* for student performance, ensuring that *student assessments* are tied to these standards, *accountability* (measuring performance of school staff against achievement objectives), *aligning district budgets* to ensure students meet the standards, creating a *climate* that supports a philosophy that all children can learn. They further must *build the collaborative partnerships* with community political and business leaders that will support student achievement as a top community priority and, finally, commit themselves to *continuous education and training* on issues related to student achievement. For each *key work* of the board, the accompanying key actions and engagement strategies are delineated. The engagement strategies place strong emphasis on community involvement in each task from visioning to setting standards and reviewing budgets. The school board must insure that each decision and type of output, e.g., standards for student performance, are thoroughly disseminated and explained to the community. The statement provides numerous suggestions on areas where parents and community should be involved in consultation and review of curriculum and learning materials, review of school data, etc. The full statement of the *Key Work of School Boards in Providing Leadership for Student Achievement* is included in Appendix A (p. 36).

The TASB *governance framework* is a broader framework of school board member responsibilities, although it also stresses the board’s role in creating the vision for enhancing student achievement and providing the guidance and direction to accomplish the vision.⁷⁹ Its preamble emphasizes the importance of the school board-superintendent leadership team to meeting the current challenges of public education. While the statement speaks more to statutory duties of school boards, it lists many of the same tasks

as the NSBA framework in ensuring that the district adopts student performance objectives and carries out strategies and programs that will accomplish the vision. The issues of climate, community engagement and partnerships are covered under the heading of *advocacy*. The full *TASB Framework for School Board Development* is included in Appendix B (p. 40).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are interesting parallels between school system structure and operations and business models. In the school context, we can look at School Boards directing School Superintendents, School Superintendents directing School Principals, School Principals directing Schoolteachers, and Schoolteachers directing Students. The business analogy would be Boards of Directors directing Presidents/CEOs, Presidents/CEOs directing Middle/Functional Area Managers, Middle/Functional Area Managers directing First-line Supervisors, and First-line Supervisors directing the Workforce.

In business research, organizational performance is typically examined at each level in the chain. Each level of interaction has the potential to influence downstream activities and overall organizational performance. Consequently, a weak link anywhere in the management chain could cause a performance shortfall. Recent management thinking has stressed placing as much decision authority and responsibility at the lowest feasible level in complex organizations -- empowering middle managers and lower-level supervisors. A positive consequence of this structural shift is that upper management has more time to spend on long-range planning and strategic issues because they are freed from routine decision making and tactical implementation. Lower-level managers embrace it because they have more input into processes and take more ownership of policies and personal responsibility for meeting goals. Site-based management where school principals are given appropriate goals and resources and allowed to develop and implement programs with strong teacher input would be the education analogy to the decentralized business model.

We are not advocating for any particular model of school district management. However, we feel it would be desirable to examine some of the linkages in the influence/decision chain presented above. We suggest that it would be helpful to determine if the quality/nature of school board member interactions or group dynamics has an effect on student performance. And, because one of the most significant charges of school boards is to recruit, select and evaluate school superintendents, it would be helpful to know whether the profile of an ideal school superintendent (the vector of important characteristics/requirements) varies across districts and whether it relates to student performance. If no relationship is revealed, it would strongly suggest that the most critical place to look for improvement opportunities would be downstream, that is, at the Superintendent -- Principal and the Principal -- Teacher levels. Learning this would be important in setting future research priorities. Conversely, if the School Board -- Superintendent relationship is found to be critical in student performance, this would confirm that additional effort is needed to understand the dynamics of effective board and superintendent relationships and transfer best practices to lower performing school districts.

A Proposed Study

First, we propose to examine the linkage between board policymaking orientations and school district performance. As a quality indicator, we would use a four-category rating system, known as the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) in Texas, because it is well-known and objective in nature. The AEIS uses the following inputs to categorize school district performance:

1. TAAS passing rate by grade, by subject, and all grades tested.
2. End of course examination participation and results.
3. Attendance rate for the full year.
4. Dropout rate by year.
5. Graduation and dropout rates.
6. Percent of high school students completing an advanced course.
7. Percent of graduates completing the Recommended High School Program.
8. Advanced placement and International Baccalaureate examination results.
9. TAAS/TASP equivalency rate.

10. SAT and ACT examination participation and results.

This measure may be supplemented by other locally agreed upon quality measures.

The AEIS methodology places Texas school districts into one of four categories:

1. Exemplary
2. Recognized
3. Acceptable
4. Low-Performing.

To look at school board group dynamics, we propose using a measurement instrument developed by Janice T. Murdock in her 1995 doctoral dissertation at Texas Tech University. She developed and pre-tested a questionnaire designed to be completed by school board members which examines three distinct approaches to school board policy making labeled as:

1. Professional
2. Political
3. Personal judgment.

We propose to use Murdock's two-page mail survey instrument to gather data from school board members across Texas. Responses from each district would be summarized statistically and district decision styles would be categorized as: Professional, Political or Personal Judgment. These findings would be compared with the AEIS category data to determine if there is a statistically significant relationship between school board group dynamics and school district performance.

Second, using the same survey opportunity, we would collect data from school board members on the importance of various superintendent characteristics. Next, they would be asked to rate the extent to which their current superintendent possesses/delivers on each characteristic. The importance data would be compared across AEIS categories, the superintendent trait possession data would be compared across AEIS categories, and a composite measure consisting of the product of these two indicators would be compared across AEIS indicators. Statistically significant results would suggest that high performing districts see different qualities of superintendents as being important than other districts. Significant results on the trait possession measure would indicate that higher performing

districts see their superintendent as being better qualified. And, for the composite measure, statistically significant results would mean that higher performing districts have superintendents with better attitude scores/approval ratings. The foregoing is stated as directional hypotheses.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary question asked in this report is whether there is any connection between the governance practices of school boards and student achievement levels. Does the manner in which school boards carry out their leadership responsibilities have any relationship to the academic success of students? Are there board practices that lead to better educational results for students? The question has become increasingly important as states adopt and refine student assessment instruments that enable a community to compare results in local school districts with those of school districts throughout the state and nation. Increasingly sophisticated analyses of test data are available to communities that enable them to examine results by specific group and type of student. Both rewards and sanctions for school districts are tied to test results.

The straightforward answer to this question is that there is little empirical evidence linking school board governance practices directly with high levels of student achievement. There is, nonetheless, a substantial body of information on effective school board governance in general. Governance practices that enable boards to focus on their key mission and responsibilities should, by their very nature, also enable them to keep student learning goals at the top of their agendas.

The report first reviewed the history of the development of school boards and the trends that frame the current challenge.

- Separate local governance boards to oversee public education, led by elected lay representatives, are a distinctly American institution. They date from the founding of the American colonies and were adopted throughout the nation as it grew.
- By the late 1800s, demands for greater efficiency and competence in the running of local schools led to the

- hiring of school superintendents and set the stage for competing claims of expertise between school boards and superintendents, between elected lay leadership and highly educated professional administrators. By the late 1930s educators were recommending that lay school boards function as legislative bodies setting school policy and those executive responsibilities were turned over to the superintendent.
- Since the 1950s school boards have been influenced by demands for more responsive and racially and ethnically diverse school board governance. This has resulted in changes in board member representation from election in at-large districts to single-member districts. Another dimension of this trend was evident in the dilemma faced by school boards in the choice of the business model of governance (operational efficiency) or the community-based model of local accountability. Is the role of board members in the operation of local schools one of *civic trusteeship* or advocacy for local constituents?
 - Frustrations with the competencies of high school graduates in the business and the higher education community and from parents have led to the broader engagement of the community in the educational enterprise and to the development of standardized assessments of student performance. This focused greater attention on school boards' ability to prepare students for the current high-tech, knowledge-based economy.

The challenge of school district governance is much greater in the two percent of the nation's large school districts, those with 25,000 plus students, than in the vast majority of medium and small school districts. The recent National School Boards Association (NSBA) survey reveals that large school district governance is more complex in terms of the policy issues addressed and the political forces to be balanced.

- While funding, student achievement, special education, educational technology and teacher quality are fairly universal concerns of all school

districts, large school districts are more likely to offer educational alternatives, programs of reform, and site-based management. They also confront more severe teacher shortages, problems of safety and substance use, and spend more time on community relations.

- The time demands of school board service in large districts are significant; 20 hours or more per week on school board business is common. And more time is spent in large districts on board training, particularly on issues of student achievement, community engagement, communications, and strategic planning.
- School board elections in large districts are more competitive and more expensive and a broader range of political forces is involved in financing elections. Districts where board members are elected in single-member districts may also be more constituency-based.
- The NSBA survey found that long-term service on school boards is relatively rare. The mean years of service reported was 6.7 years and less than half of those surveyed reported that they would definitely seek another term. Considering the time that it takes to master school district governance questions, this trend does not bode well for development among school board members of the expertise needed to lead long-term improvements in student achievement.

Studies discussing school board policy making styles do not make a direct link with student performance; however, they show that school board members in general use a professional policy making approach in matters concerning curriculum and instruction, while personal judgment drives decision making on financial and personnel issues. A third policy making orientation, political decision making, is characterized by intense political bargaining among board members, superintendent and constituents and is characterized by split votes on policy issues. Studies of individual states and case studies found that:

- Large urban districts in New York State that were dominated by political decision making orientations performed more poorly on student achievement indicators than the few professional urban boards. Suburban and rural boards tended to embrace professional policy orientations.
- The same board decision making process that leads a district to become fiscally cost-effective works for increasing academic success. They maintain an intense focus on students' needs, are characterized by a spirit of cooperation, and have strategies in place to prevent academic slippage.
- Specific policies and goals regarding not just student performance but also dropouts produced improved academic results (Roanoke, Virginia, case study).
- A board policy requiring mandatory tutoring by certified teachers for students who participate in extracurricular sports and are failing core subjects lead to significant academic improvement (suburban case study).
- School boards and superintendents that forge a strong team-leadership relationship can more effectively create a strong community vision and develop long-range plans for student success and improved professional development. They are more likely to achieve a cohesive focus on student achievement. The definition of student achievement needs to be broad based and rely on multiple indicators, not simply scores on a single standard test.
- The monitoring and evaluation of school performance is one of the most difficult board roles; It essentially means looking into "learning," the curriculum and its delivery and board members are likely to view this as the role of professional educators. In addition to listening to professionals' interpretations of test results, boards in the United Kingdom established curriculum committees to visit schools and study high focus curriculum areas or were part of monitoring teams made up of school board members,

senior staff, teachers, parents, students and advisors.

Clarity in the roles of school boards and superintendents also appears to be critical to for sound school district governance. Lessons from studies of non-profit and public education boards emphasize that:

- School boards need to understand their primary role in setting the vision and key policies for the organization (policy planning, development and evaluation).
- The foremost tasks in *policy governance* are first to determine to whom and for what they are accountable, then, as a body, define their expectations of themselves, the superintendent, the board chair and any committees.⁸⁰
- Boards must establish clear performance expectations for the superintendent.
- Board training needs to regularly focus on evaluating and maintaining role clarity between boards and superintendents.

When the circumstances within the organization are right, the concepts and tools of strategic planning can assist school districts to develop the new or revised strategies needed to cope with changing community demands and mandates for student achievement. If a dominant school board-superintendent leadership coalition exists to sponsor the process and see it through to completion, strategic planning can result in greater clarity of future direction and priorities for the school district. Hundreds of school districts in the United States have successfully undertaken the process, often assisted by outside facilitators. The NSBA survey indicates that, though school boards receive quite a bit of training, strategic planning is one of the topics on which there is moderate interest for additional training.

Best practices suggestions for school boards from the experience of corporate boards also focus on key roles and guidelines for sound governance.

- Again, role clarity in the functions of board members and chief executives is critical.

- Boards determine mission and key strategies, select and evaluate the chief executive and delegate responsibilities for administration to him/her (they do not micro-manage). They govern by broad policies and objectives agreed upon by the CEO and monitor the organization's work to ensure that programs are implemented and targets met. They see that sufficient resources are acquired for the work of the organization, account to the public for the services provided, and work to enhance the organization's public image and assess their own performance.
- The California Public Employees Retirement System (CalPERS) criterion for rating corporate boards identifies the importance of establishing clear guidelines for board independence and leadership and governance. The board itself needs to have a written statement of its own governance principles, establish performance criteria for itself as a collective body and individual behavior expectations for members, and regularly conduct self-evaluations.
- John H. Holcomb's work on business marketing practices views education as a business that must have an identifiable, quantifiable product in order to be successful. Consumers must help define the educational product and then the *school team* must develop the concrete, measurable objectives for delivering the agree-upon product. He suggests that school boards like businesses can not be all things to all people; they must determine which of three value disciplines to follow: operational leadership, customer intimacy or product leadership.

Both the NSBA and the Texas State Board of Education (TSBOE) have developed prescriptive statements or frameworks for school boards interested in improved student achievement. While the statements were developed for slightly different purposes, they both emphasize the important role of school boards in establishing a strong vision for student achievement as well as in determining

the standards to be set, how assessments will be conducted, and accountability ensured.

- The NSBA statement also calls for community engagement in each of the *key works* from visioning to setting standards and aligning district budgets to ensure standards are met.

Based on the school board and corporate governance literature reviewed in this report, the authors recommend a future research agenda to:

- Examine the linkage between board policymaking orientations and school district performance that would make use of the four-category rating systems known as the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) in Texas, supplemented by other locally agreed upon quality measures, and a group dynamics questionnaire to be mailed to school board members across Texas.
- Using the same survey opportunity, data on the importance of various superintendent characteristics would be collected from school board members. This data will also be compared against school district AEIS categories to determine the superintendent qualities that correlate with high performing school districts.

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percent of high school students completing an advanced course; percent of graduates completing the Recommended High School Program; Advance Placement and International Baccalaureate examination results; TAAS/TASP equivalency rate and SAT and ACT examination participation and results.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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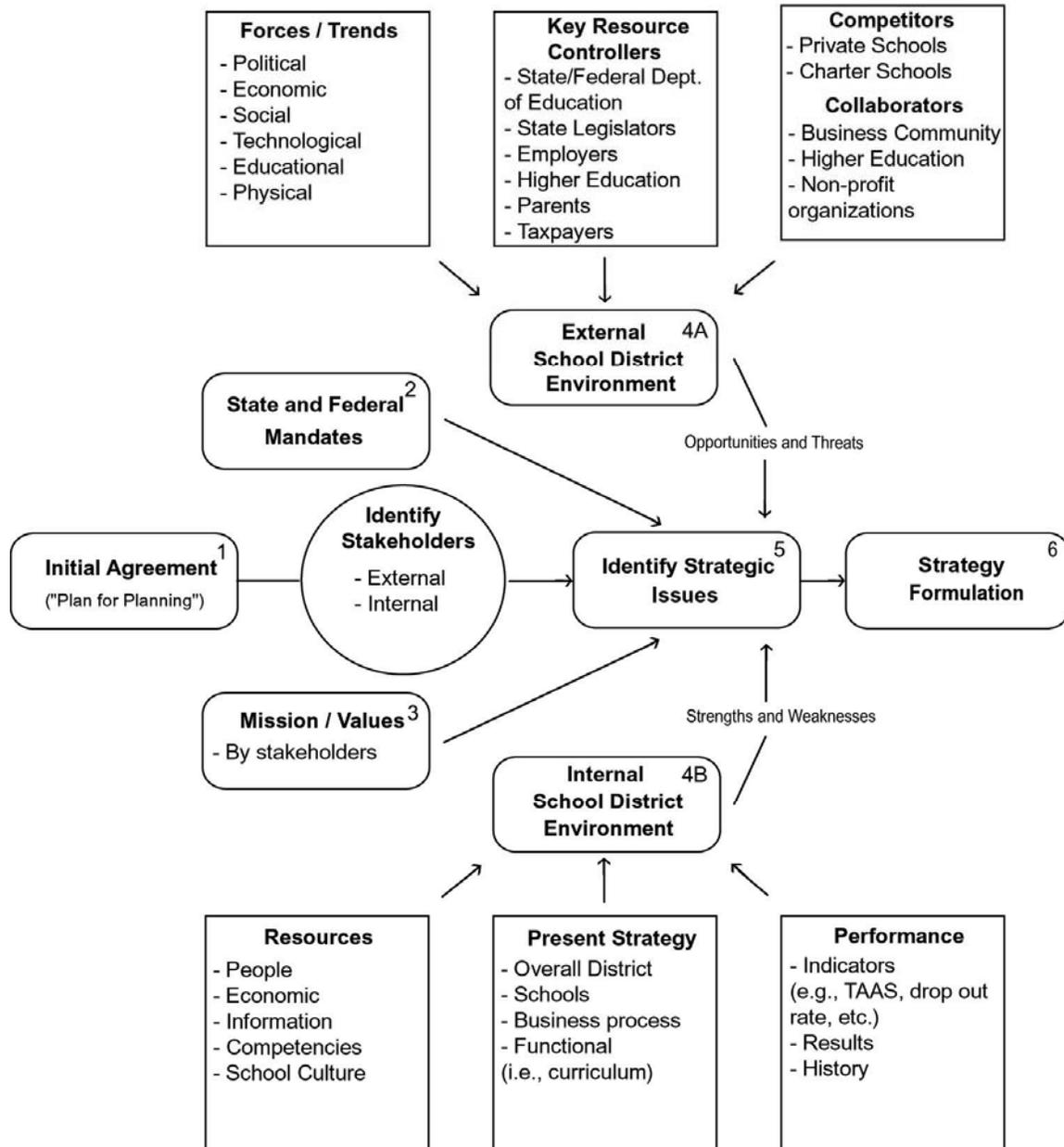
Table 1
SCHOOL BOARD POLICY ORIENTATION DECISION MAKING STYLES

Characteristics of Board Decision Making Styles	
<i>Professional</i>	<i>Political</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defers to educators and/or administrators in making policy • Strive to seek consensus • Unanimous voting on policy issues • Permit professional administrators to implement policy board adopts • Most commonly used in decisions affecting curriculum and instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes policy without deferring to superintendent • Intense political bargaining among board members, superintendent and constituents • Split votes on policy issues • Frequently yield to represented constituents • Often closed to input that might impact policy-making decision
Characteristics of Individual Decision Making Style	
<i>Personal Judgment</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal beliefs and value system are central • Most commonly used in decisions affecting personnel and finances 	

Source: Greene, K. (1992). Models of school board policy making. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 28: 220-236. and Murdock, J.T. (1995). *Determinants of policy-making orientation of school board members in Texas*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University.

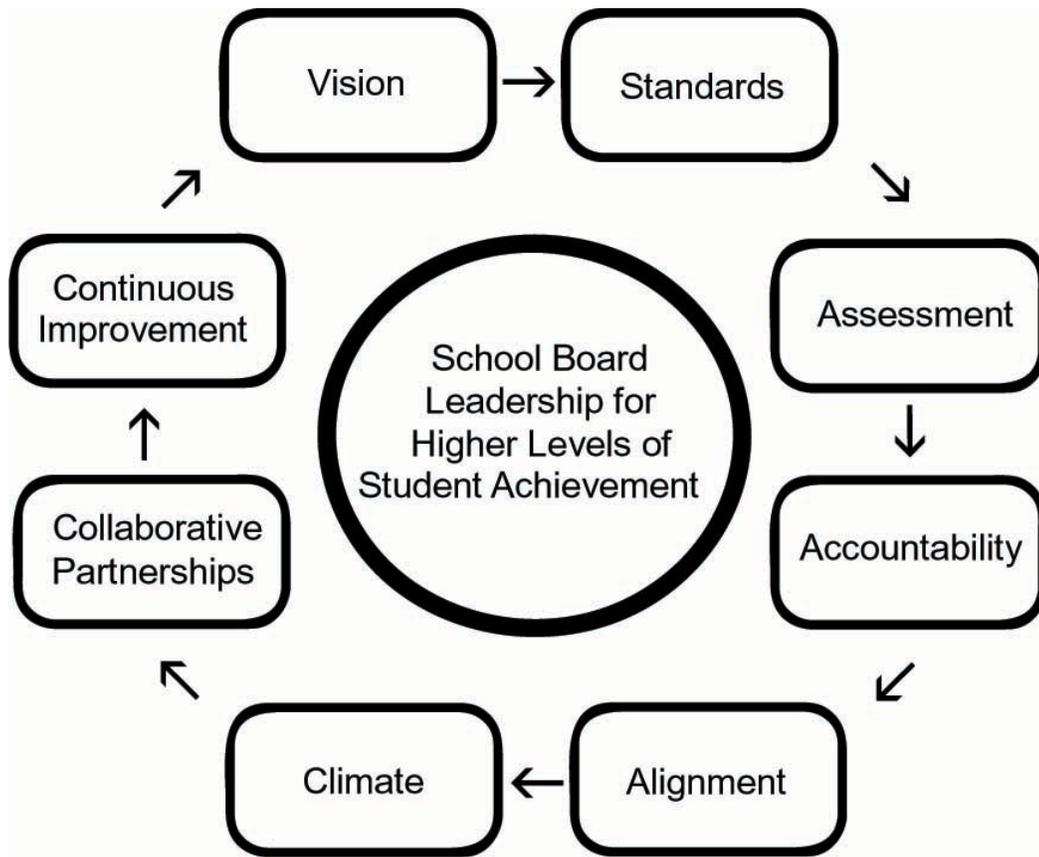
Figure 1

Steps in School District Strategic Planning Process



Modified from: John M. Bryson, 1995. Strategic Planning for Public and Non-Profit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, p. 24-25.

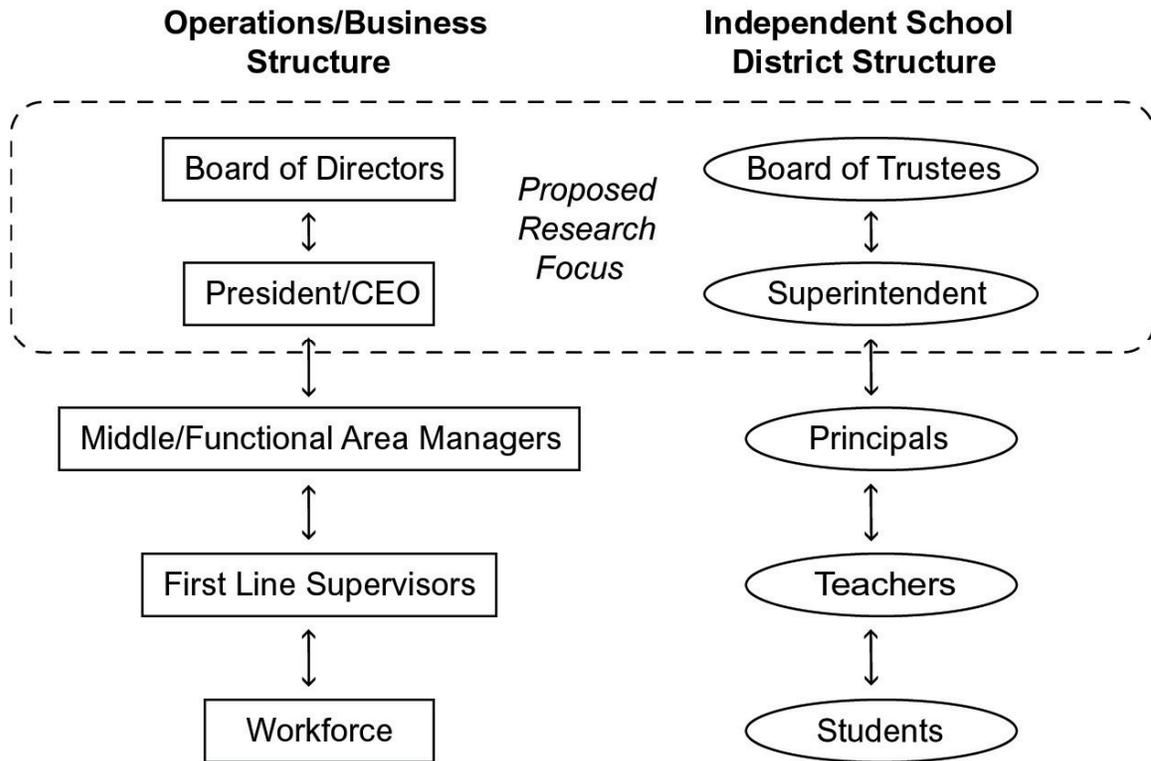
Figure 2
Key Work of School Boards



Source: National Association of School Boards

Figure 3

Framework for Organizational Performance Analysis



APPENDIX A

National Association of School Boards

**KEY WORK OF SCHOOL BOARDS IN PROVIDING LEADERSHIP
FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

**National Association of School Boards
Leadership for Student Achievement
The Key Work of School Boards**

1. Vision

- Create district and community consensus on achievement objectives.
- Clearly define expectations for what students should know and be able to do.
- Quantify those expectations and set agreed-upon measures for achievement.

Key Actions

Engage in a comprehensive planning process to establish a clear **vision of student achievement as top priority** of school board, staff, and community.

Engagement Strategies

- Involve community in vision setting process through open forums, solicitation of input, and broad-based review.
- Include community in regular reevaluation and adjustment of vision.
- Establish a process for on-going community involvement in the planning.

2. Standards

- Establish clear standards for student performance and communicate them continually.
- Base standards on an external source that has credibility in the community.
- Disseminate standards clearly and widely to students, staff and community.

Key Actions

Set clear **standards for student performance**.

Engagement Strategies

Create community forums to discuss:

- What standards should be set for your students
- How your proposed standards relate to state, national, or international norms
- What needs your parent, business, and higher education communities identify for students.

3. Assessment

- Ensure that assessments are tied to established standards.
- Use multiple, ongoing assessment measures.
- Ensure that assessments are explained to the community.

Key Actions

Establish an **assessment** process that measures student achievement at regular intervals.

Engagement Strategies

- Establish community advisory representation as essential part of assessment development and review process.
- Assure that assessment program is widely and thoroughly explained to the community at large both through meetings and the media.

4. Accountability

- Measure the performance of all school staff members, administrators and the school board itself against student achievement objectives.
- Continually track progress and report results honestly.

Key Actions

Establish a strong **accountability** process.

Engagement Strategies

- Include parents and other community members on the team deciding on strategies for publication and dissemination of accountability data.
- Invite widespread input from community on how data should be disaggregated.
- Promote widespread review and comment on published data, including disaggregated data. Discipline data, drop-out rates, learning and teaching styles and techniques should also be reviewed.
- Establish policy and expectation that principal's meet with community to review and discuss school data.
- Establish policies and allow time for parents to meet with teachers to discuss.

5. Alignment

- Align resources to ensure students meet standards.
- Include the community in the review of the district budget and management process.
- Ensure that resources support parents in helping their children with schoolwork.

Key Actions

Align resources to focus on students' meeting the standards.

Engagement Strategies

- Establish processes for community input on budget formulation, including priority setting and realignments.
- Include business community review and commentary not only on budget process but also on school district business management practices.
- Include parents in district curriculum review process.
- Publish data on school staffing with rationale regarding meeting standards.
- Provide parents the opportunity to review and comment on learning materials selection process.
- Encourage school staff to invite parents in at night to learn what materials and technology students are using to meet achievement standards.
- Budget for resources to support parents who want to help their children with academic work.
- Encourage community volunteers (not just parents) in schools to help with academic work.
- Establish business partnerships.

6. Climate

- Create a climate that supports the philosophy that all children can learn at high levels.
- Empower staff to meet the needs of all students.
- Model mutual respect and professional behavior in school board meetings and with school district superintendent and staff.

Key Actions

Create a **positive learning climate for student and staff success**.

Engagement Strategies

- Include parents, students, staff and community on building level learning improvement teams.
- Survey graduates, parents and the broader community to gauge satisfaction with school district services and operations.
- Share the information gathered with staff and community and use the information in the planning and budgeting process.

- Encourage community groups to recognize outstanding staff and quality performance related to student success in meeting performance standards.
- Encourage community volunteerism in schools, especially to help students learn, and recognize volunteers regularly.
- Provide opportunities for public comment at Board meetings.
- Make school facilities available for community use.

7. Collaborative Partnerships

- Build collaborative relationships with political and business leaders to develop a consensus for student success.
- Communicate regularly with federal and state officials about student achievement.
- Model behavior that emphasizes trust, teamwork, and shared accountability.

Key Actions

Build **collaborative relationships** with municipalities, political and business communities in your state, and other child-centered organizations, with a focus on developing a consensus **for student achievement** as a top community priority.

Engagement Strategies

- Schedule regular meetings with your community's state legislative delegation to make them aware of your efforts and progress on student success standards.
- Communicate freely with local elected officials about student achievement issues, activities, and progress. Invite them to be part of recognition efforts.
- Encourage the superintendent to establish regular communication and collaborative child-centered working relationships with Social Services agencies, with the police department, and with the Juvenile Justice system.

8. Continuous Improvement

- Commit to continuous education and training on issues related to achievement.
- Use data on student achievement to set priorities for allocating resources.
- Adjust strategic plan on the basis of data and community input.

Key Actions

Commit to **continuous improvement** for student achievement.

Engagement Strategies

- Discuss at Board meetings the development activities that board members have been involved in and how these activities have increased the Board's capacity to lead improvements in the district.
- Assure community involvement in the regular review of data and in making recommendations regarding changes in program.
- Promote ongoing discussion of student achievement indicators and efforts at meetings of community organizations by having board of education members and appropriate school system staff offer to participate in these meetings.
- Use these meetings to receive input and reactions to the district's efforts and success regarding student achievement.
- Take an active role with the media to discuss successes and planned improvements.

APPENDIX B

Texas Association of School Boards

FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL BOARD DEVELOPMENT

FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL BOARD DEVELOPMENT

The Texas State Board of Education adopted in January 1996 a framework to be used in structuring continuing education for school board members. This framework, to be sent annually to all board presidents, replaces the current Statewide Standards for the Duties of a School Board Member. The Statewide Standards had been used since 1986 to guide board members in their professional development.

Governance Framework

Preamble

The Board of Trustees is the educational policymaking body for Texas public school districts. To effectively meet the challenges of public education, school boards and superintendents must function together as a leadership team. Each leadership team must annually assess its development needs as a corporate body and individually to gain an understanding of the vision, structure, accountability, advocacy, and unity needed to provide educational programs and services that ensure the equity and excellence in performance of all students. The Framework for School Board Development has been approved by the State Board of Education to provide the critical areas of development for all public school boards.

Vision

The board ensures creation of a shared vision that promotes enhanced student achievement.

- The board keeps the district focus on the educational welfare of all children.
- The board adopts a shared vision based on community beliefs to guide local education.
- The board ensures that the vision supports the state's mission, objectives, and goals for education established by law.
- The board ensures that the district vision expresses the present and future needs of the children and community.
- The board demonstrates its commitment to the vision by using the vision to guide all board deliberations, decisions, and actions.

Structure

The board provides guidance and direction for accomplishing the vision.

- The board recognizes the respective roles of the Legislature, State Board of Education, the Texas Education Agency, and local boards of trustees in the governance of the public schools.
- The board fulfills the statutory duties of the local board of trustees and upholds all laws, rules, ethical procedures, and court orders pertaining to schools and school employees.
- The board focuses its actions on policymaking, planning, and evaluation.
- The board adopts a planning and decision-making process consistent with state statute that uses participation, information, research, and evaluation to help achieve the district's vision.
- The board ensures that the district planning and decision-making process enables all segments of the community, parents, and professional staff to contribute meaningfully to achieving the district's vision.
- The board develops and adopts policies that provide guidance for accomplishing the district's vision, mission, and goals.
- The board adopts a budget that incorporates sound business and fiscal practices and provides resources to achieve the district's vision, mission, and goals.

- The board adopts goals, approves student-performance objectives, and establishes policies that provide a well-balanced curriculum resulting in improved student learning.
- The board approves goals, policies, and programs that ensure a safe and disciplined environment conducive to learning.
- The board oversees the management of the district by employing a superintendent and evaluating the superintendent's performance in providing education leadership, managing daily operations, and performing all duties assigned by law.
- The board adopts policies and standards for hiring, assigning, appraising, and compensating school district personnel in compliance with state laws and rules.
- The board promotes school board service as a meaningful way to make long-term contributions to the local community and society.

Accountability

The board measures and communicates how well the vision is being accomplished.

- The board ensures progress toward achievement of district goals through a systematic, timely, and comprehensive review of reports prepared by or at the direction of the superintendent.
- The board monitors the effectiveness and efficiency of instructional programs by reviewing reports prepared by or at the direction of the superintendent and directs the superintendent to make modifications that promote maximum achievement for all students.
- The board ensures that appropriate assessments are used to measure achievement of all students.
- The board reports district progress to parents and community in compliance with state laws and regulations.
- The board reviews district policies for effective support of the district's vision, mission, and goals.
- The board reviews the efficiency and effectiveness of district operations and use of resources in supporting the district/s vision, mission, and goals.
- The board evaluates the superintendent's performance annually in compliance with state laws and regulations.
- The board annually evaluates its performance in fulfilling the board's duties and responsibilities, and the board's ability to work with the superintendent as a team.

Advocacy

The board promotes the vision.

- The board demonstrates its commitment to the shared vision, mission, and goals by clearly communicating them to the superintendent, staff, and community.
- The board ensures an effective two-way communication system between the district and its students, employees, the media, and the community.
- The board builds partnerships with community, business, and governmental leaders to influence and expand educational opportunities and meet the needs of students.
- The board supports children by establishing partnerships between and among the district, parents, business leaders, and other community members as an integral part of the district's educational program.
- The board leads in recognizing the achievements of students, staff, and others in education.
- The board promotes school board service as a meaningful way to make long-term contributions to the local community and society.

Unity

The board works with the superintendent to lead the district toward the vision.

- The board develops skills in teamwork, problem solving and decision making.

- The board establishes and follows local policies, procedures, and ethical standards governing the conduct and operations of the board.
- The board understands and adheres to laws and local policies regarding the board's responsibility to set policy and the superintendent's responsibility to manage the school district and to direct employees in district and campus matters.
- The board recognizes the leadership role of the board president and adheres to law and local policies regarding the duties and responsibilities of the board president and other officers.
- The board adopts and adheres to established policies and procedures for receiving and addressing ideas and concerns from students, employees, and the community.
- The board makes decisions as a whole only at properly called meetings and recognizes that individual members have no authority to take individual action in policy or district and campus administrative matters.
- The board supports decisions of the majority after honoring the right of individual members to express opposing viewpoints and vote their convictions.