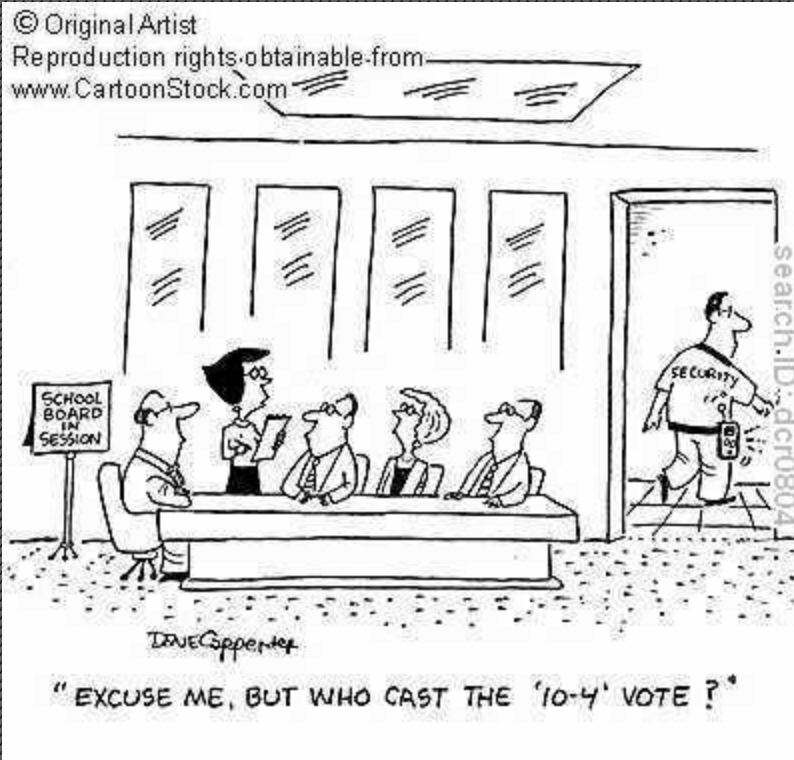


The Essential School Board Book

By: Nancy Walser



Seven Conditions for Achievement

- Shared leadership
- Continuous improvement
- Ability to create and sustain initiatives
- Supportive workplace for staff
- Staff development
- Support for school sites through data and information
- Community involvement

Shared Leadership

- Focuses on student learning through a shared vision, high expectations, and dynamic leadership among all levels.
- To be progressive at the board level we need to set expectations for ourselves, staff and students.
- Work towards a mission for the district.

Continuous Improvement

- A continuous focus on improving education, with high levels of involvement and shared decision making.
- Spend time questioning the improvement process-
 - What is our goal in the end?
 - How are we going to get where we need to go?
 - Why are we working towards this goal?
 - When will we accomplish our goals?

Ability to Create and Sustain Initiatives

- An understanding of how to organize the people and the school environment to start and sustain an improvement effort.
- How does the board and administration work together to put change agents in place?
- What is the boards role in the change process?
- How do we sustain a process of change when it meets resistance?

Supportive Workplace for Staff

- A supportive workplace that enables all staff to succeed in their roles.
- Each member of the school district has a role in the achievement of the students.
- Build positive relationships!



Staff Development

- Regular school wide staff development that is focused on studying teaching and learning.
- Spend time looking at new teaching methods.
- Incorporate technology tools into the curriculum.
- Focus on the students needs in all grades and work together as a whole district. -Departments
- We need to develop time for our staff to collaborate and share ideas.

Support for School Sites Through Data and Information

- Using data and information on student needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level.
- Data is extremely important! Data sets the direction and allows us to formulate goals for the district.
- We can focus on specific students or global issues using data.

Community Involvement

- A close connection between the school, the parents, and the community.
- How do we link the community into the school process?
- Spend time visiting with people in the community.
 - Openly share concerns and ideas, candidly communicating our intentions and opinions.
 - Foster thoughtful decision-making by freely sharing ideas.

Boards on the Move

- Members of moving boards:
 - Could mention specific initiatives being implemented.
 - Describe goals related to learning
 - Structures that we in place for improving teaching and learning
 - Express confidence in staff and support for training
 - Make links between training and goals for student learning
 - Used data in the decision making process
 - Could discuss ways the board interacted with the community.

Boards on the Move

- Board members feel that “it was possible to reach all kids”
- The most important thing board members should know is that “attitudes of staff members will mimic that of the board members”
- How can you impact the learning and get the staff to follow you?

Board Practices

- The six characteristics of “well-governed districts”
 - 1. Stability – Members served at least six to eight years
 - 2. Short regular meetings coupled with annual or bi-annual goal setting retreats
 - 3. Effective management that resulted in referring complaints to administration
 - 4. A communicative board chair that functions as the go-between for the supt. And his/her colleagues
 - 5. Focused on student achievement and support the superintendent as the district leader
 - 6. Ability to work collaboratively, resulting in a “high degree of trust”

Board Practices

- Here are a list of practices that effective boards will use:
 - Work together to establish a vision and a set of values
 - Articulate results
 - Create conditions for achieving results through policy
 - Effective use of resources
 - Community engagement
 - Collaborative relations with the superintendent and union negotiations

School Board Role

- The role of the school board member today has to be one of leadership working in tandem with the superintendent to make sure the public's interests are served by the public school.
- Make sure to engage and link to the community
- Work with the superintendent to find the right solutions, ask the right questions, and focus on the right issues.
- “Model collaboration from the top”

High Functioning Boards

- High functioning boards consistently point to collaboration with their colleagues and their superintendent
- Everything in the school system is focused on the kids needs
- Everything is also focused on student achievement
- Consistently look at data and trends to enhance student achievement

Building a Foundation for Student Success

- “Grow a culture where everyone is trying to do the very best for our kids”.
- “Whatever quality exists in a school district begins and ends with the school board. The board sets the tone so the entire staff can do their work”.
- The focus of the board should be on the outcomes and what they want to accomplish, while the superintendent’s job is about how we are going to meet those expectations and to explain the plan.

Five Roles of a School Board

- Set clear expectations for outcomes of district improvement work.
 - Hold the board and staff accountable for meeting the expectations.
 - Create conditions for success.
 - Build the collective will to succeed.
 - Learn together as a board team.
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- “Spend time finding out where there are gaps and what we need to do to improve”.

Commit to Change

- How can we become outcome orientated?
- Focus on student achievement
- “A board’s resolve to stick with a promising educational initiative can be a real tipping point for a district”.
- Commit to change things that directly impact the students and their achievement.
- Spend time collaborating with other board members and staff.
- “It’s about what is good for kids”.

Beware of Backlash

- Board Members have two masters:
 - The inner specialized world of schools and the outer world of the community, which may know little of what is really going on inside the schools.
 - Make sure that you are engaged. It is not about just showing up once a month. Keep up with information that the superintendent provides.
 - Keep asking good questions

Staying Focused on Student Achievement

- This can be a tricky balancing act.
 - Board members need to know enough about the work of educators seeking to raise achievement to be able to assess their efforts, support them, and communicate about them, without dictating what should be done.
 - High functioning boards restructure meetings for new purposes, setting goals to focus the work of the district, and asking for the kind of data that can help them in their role as policy makers.

The Board Chair

- The point person for representing the rest of the board in working with the superintendent to set meeting agendas.
- Manage conflict between board members and between individuals and the superintendent.
- The chair person is “vital to the effectiveness of the superintendent and the board”.
- Reilinger, a former board chair “likens the chair’s role to that of a coach”.

Monitoring with Data

- Good data is needed not only for accountability purposes and for monitoring student achievement, but also to better understand the needs for initiatives recommended by the superintendent.
- Don't fall into the DRIP mode. We cannot be data rich and information poor.
- Use your data to set the direction for the district and student achievement.

Lagging vs. Leading

- Lagging Indicators – A lagging indicator is something that is reported from previous data. An example of a lagging indicator for a school district would be the Dakota Step Tests.
- Leading Indicators – A leading indicator is something a district personnel can use to signal to teachers how well students do on tests before they will take them. Examples are the DACS testing, AR Tests, Pre/Post tests.

Data

- If you look at data as a weapon, it will never work for you; if you use it as information and feedback to guide decisions, it will always work for you.
- Data alone will not fix a problem.
- Having data doesn't always guarantee that a good decision will be made.
- Sometimes data can be your friend and help you make a politically unpopular decision, because everyone can see the evidence.

Avoiding Pitfalls

- Discuss figure 4.3 on page 61.
- Does the Marion Board need a set of operating principles?

TEAM Approach

- To build a sense of teamwork communication between any board member and myself will be relayed to all board members.
- This allows us to be all on the same playing field.
- We need to look at the overall picture and get everyone on the same page from the board to the administration to the staff.
- Together Everyone Achieves More!!

Professional Development

- Professional development for board members is as important as professional development for surgeons.
- Board members need more skills than ever before.
- Board members need to have enough awareness about educational issues to begin asking the critical questions.
- They also need enough knowledge about those issues to evaluate the answers.

Modeling

- The expectation is that you want kids to learn, you should be a master learner
- Boards that train themselves also model the importance of professional development to school staff.
- The staff will take the approach that if the board is learning then they should also be learning.

Communication

- Websites, e-mail lists, electronic newsletters, district blogs, automated calling, polls and Internet surveys are ways that a high functioning board communicates and interacts with their public.
- You can never communicate enough. The most important thing is to keep trying.

Shared Leadership

- Shared leadership is more of a two-way interaction than a one-way conveying of information.
- Convince the community members to help with projects.
- If you involve the community in creating something they will feel that they have a stake in whether it succeeds.
- It is easier to accept change when you are a part of the creating the change.

7 Traits of a Good Board Member

- Belief that student achievement is possible for every student.
- An understanding of the value of school in strengthening a community.
- Some ability to analyze data or know what it can provide.
- Ability to be a critical thinker.
- Need to be in it for the students, not yourself
- Need to be a team player.
- Ability to listen and find common ground.

The Direction for Marion

- As a board we need to set goals that involve the community.
- We need to work as a team
- Be unified at the end of a decision
- The most important thing is that all decisions are made for one reason. What is best for the kids.

Bibliography

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