

Sarah Ricks
NSBA Report
2017

Sessions Attended:

Pre-Conference Workshop- Boards Matter: What School Boards Can Do to Improve Student Performance

Notes:

A 2009-2010 study by Hess and Meeks shows that school boards make a difference to student achievement.

Board members matter when knowledge, skills and actions align.

Boards should be engaged in a continuous, ongoing monitoring of student performance. How the students are doing becomes the paramount responsibility of boards.

The board's Perspectives, Capacity and Actions matter.

Perspectives- what do we believe is possible? The board has the ultimate responsibility to shape and monitor school culture. We need trust- in high trust systems things get done faster. We need curiosity- curiosity can lead to a path of high performance. We need a forward focus- we are preparing kids for their future not our past. We need to believe that it is possible for all students to succeed. How we say things is important. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Our beliefs should not enable excuses for why students are not achieving.

Capacity- The Iowa Lighthouse Research Project demonstrated that board's capacity matters. Our beliefs matter. Good boards set clear expectations, they provide the right conditions for success to happen, they hold themselves and other accountable for the results, they build collective will and they learn together as a team.

Action- Governance actions most tied to student achievement include having superintendent goals that are focused on student outcomes, communicating expectations to the community, basing contract decisions on objective evaluations, collaborating with staff and the community on a district plan, basing board work on district goals and monitoring progress toward the goals and the plan. Board agendas should be tied to the district plan/goals.

Resources to Read:

The Speed of Trust by Stephen M.R. Covey

<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards.html>

Potential Actions to be Taken:

1. Use the action planning guide in board workshop to generate united action plans.
2. Create a board beliefs document and then tell people about our positive beliefs.
3. Establish clear superintendent performance goals focused on student achievement by having Dr. Sullivan provide suggestions for annual goals and then negotiating the targets so that they are a stretch but not impossible.
4. Ask for monthly data reports from administrators on student data and building improvement plans- only one building per month so that each admin only has to present once a year. Ask questions about subgroups of achievement.
5. Find out if we can partner with state schools to get data on how our graduates do in college.

Pre-Conference Workshop- A School Board's Guide to the Maker Movement

Notes:

The maker movement is about global, collective learning. It is DIY, reinvent, recycle, shared solutions, hackerspaces, fab labs etc. It changes education in four ways: Place- where is learning happening? At a desk? Culture/Identity- can kids bring their good ideas to school? Belief- what do we believe about teaching and learning? Traditional? Or learning by doing? Process- when is learning happening and who is directing it?

Schools can't change the outside world but we can make the inside world a better place. There are a number of low-cost high yield tech resources like the Raspberry Pi computer priced at 5-35 dollars depending on capabilities. Traditional materials are also important and observing students manipulating materials can often give teachers more information about what a student is able to do than a test.

We think that kids are good at technology but often they aren't. There is a difference between active and passive use of technology.

Stop throwing old technologies out! Old computers and systems are still good for something.

Programming is the new liberal art- it gives children agency.

Major Principles of the Maker Movement

- Young people have a remarkable capacity of intensity (often discipline problems go away with maker style education)
- We have an obligation to introduce children to things they don't yet know they love
- Because of free educational resources, schools will become less viable in the future unless we make time in school the best seven hours of a kid's life
- Knowledge is a consequence of experience- Piaget
- Making does not always result in a physical artifact

Making adds enhanced expressiveness, precision and reliability, the ability to create real things, making complexity accessible and it is consistent with what we know about childhood development. Teachers can do this! They can make the switch. We cannot behave as if children are competent if we believe that teachers are incompetent.

Resources to Read:

Invent to Learn by Gary Stager and Sylvia Martinez

Make Magazine

Conrad Wolfram's TED talk

Potential Actions to be Taken:

1. Have a discussion about the general direction of education in the future. Which side of the dichotomy are we on? Is there a middle way?
2. Re-discuss the idea of having a "big ideas" contest tied to the DPS Foundation grants which allows freedom to pilot innovative teaching ideas.

General Session- Scott Kelly

Mr. Kelly was a good reminder of someone who is capable of great things but who struggled in school. He had "the right stuff" but it took something to spark his interest to bring out his best abilities. He encouraged us to reach for something better in education.

The School Board President-Superintendent Partnership: Achieving Excellence

Notes:

The Board/Superintendent relationship does more to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of schools than any other single factor. The superintendent should meet with the board to determine the board's priorities. It is clear that the superintendent is the board's employee and only employee. The board trusts the superintendent to do the rest. The board president leads the development, implementation and evaluation of the superintendent goals and focus areas, models good governance and good communication, is the "face" of the board and primary spokesperson and is the primary liaison with the superintendent.

The key characteristics of a good relationship are a shared mission, trust, communication, positivity, mutual respect, clear expectations, supportive of one another, sense of humor and collaboration. It is important that the community see that the two leaders of the district are working together. The board needs to publicly support the superintendent at all times.

Communication- what is just right? There should be open, honest and regular communication via email, texts, phone calls and meetings. There should be agenda-setting meetings with the board leadership. Weekly board packets should be sent out. There should be no surprises for the superintendent or the board.

Practical Steps to improve the relationship:

- Bring a positive intent to the relationship
- Take the time to get to know each other
- Respect each other's expertise
- Know your roles; reach an agreement on the division of labor
- Help each other be successful
- Propose multiple solutions to complex problems
- Support the board's final decision
- Model a respectful, collaborative and positive relationship

Trust + Communication + Collaboration = Partnership

Potential Actions to be Taken:

1. Consider writing a policy which defines the board/superintendent relationship.

The 360 Superintendent Evaluation: A Tool for Communication Between the Board and Superintendent

Notes:

The 360 survey has a four point scale. A sample calendar of implementation looks like this:

July- adopt goals

November- quarterly self-evaluation and progress report #1 on the goals given to board

January- quarterly report #2 given

February- 360 survey administered to staff and community via survey monkey

March- Board reviews 360 survey and receives quarterly report #3

April- Board gives a summary evaluation of the goals

May- Supt responds to 360 evaluation and board summary evaluation- Board gives final ratings on evaluation

June- Final report from Supt on goal progress and board retreat

Things Learned from Experience

- Define the four point scale especially “meets expectations”, dispel the held notions that this is a “C” performance
- Anonymity- ensure all responses are anonymous except for the board’s responses, it is important for the supt to know what each board member thinks. A relationship of trust is imperative. It is extremely important to make sure the supt and board are in sync.
- The supt should send the surveys to staff and community, he is asking for feedback on his performance not the board.
- Must use SMART goals, usually 4-6. Goals are only 1-year goals and are limited to six categories: academics, budget, facilities, co-curricular, professional development and community relations.

The system leads to continual dialogue. Some goals lead to other goals. For example, Goal 1.

Develop a hybrid schedule A. we can’t because our students need 8 minutes between classes

because of our facilities. Goal 2. Bring options for a High School renovation master plan.

Goal 3. Present options to community and select one.

Potential Actions to be Taken

1. Review current superintendent evaluation, add or delete items and select items for the various 360 surveys- staff, teachers, admins, community. Define the four-point scale.
2. Develop annual superintendent goals.
3. Create the 360 surveys using survey monkey and communicate the importance of it to staff.
4. Create our own evaluation schedule so that everything gets done in a timely manner that is also consistent with NDCC.

Five Steps to Develop a Successful School Volunteer Program

Notes:

Pewaukee school district hired a part-time volunteer coordinator for \$20 an hour to work M-Th 8 am to 1 pm. In exchange they got 32,000 hours of volunteer time. She developed a volunteer handbook which included

- Admin contact information
- Characteristics of children
- Learning styles
- Policies and procedures for each school
- Application w/SSN for background check

Steps

1. Recruit- promote volunteer opportunities, have an online registration page, advertise in local newspapers and magazines
2. Develop- coordinate schedule with each classroom, grade and school, fill openings with volunteers, hold building orientation and procedures review, train volunteers with instructional techniques from intervention coaches (aka strategists)
3. Engage- meet with the volunteers each day, communicate schedule conflicts and find substitutes, send thank you cards, do a spotlight on a volunteer, give recognition and chocolates
4. Retain- at training, invite returning volunteers to share their experiences and ideas with new volunteers, invite volunteers to school events, only commit them to 1-3 hours per week, make efficient use of their time, give a volunteer survey so they have a voice

5. Celebrate- end of year volunteer breakfast with a student performance, door prizes and goodies

Types of volunteers used:

- Lunch Bunch bookclub facilitators
- Math Mentors play games with kids to target math skills
- Expert Listeners listen to readers, help with vocabulary and ask comprehension questions
- Materials Prep cutting, laminating, etc.

Benefits for students are both academic and social- it's another positive adult relationship. Students improve in self-esteem and test scores. Volunteers experience meaningful student engagement and create relationships with students and community. The district gets additional ambassadors and community partnerships. It also serves as a pipeline for future employees such as paras. The district also allows high school volunteers in the elementary schools.

Consistency and Efficiency- build a system around volunteering

- Have a conduit between teachers and volunteers
- Centralize registration- a volunteer form is given at student registration
- Do global background checks on all applicants
- Give systematic training and building orientations
- Celebrate the volunteers
- Celebrate the improved test scores

Potential Actions to be Taken:

1. Hire a part time volunteer coordinator! That is a huge return on investment.
2. Investigate costs associated with a program like this such as background checks and a clock in/out system.

Abandoning Age Based Learning- Six Teaching and Learning Methods Using Taylor County Schools' Six Spoke Wheel of Learning

Notes:

Taylor County Schools has 2,800 students and actually MET NCLB standards. Their schools are schools of distinction.

No one is allowed to fail. Period. The district hired 3 district drop-out prevention people, one for each level- elementary, middle and high. Anyone who wants to drop out has to see the superintendent. If a kid wants to work on cars all day- fine. You can get your math, science and history as it relates to a combustion engine. It took teachers six months to adjust to the new way of doing things.

Six spokes of learning:

- Traditional
- Self-paced (flipped-classroom with recorded lessons- pay teachers extra to put lessons on videos)
- Project based
- Peer led
- Virtual (Odyssey Ware)
- Cardinal academy (self-directed learning for students who are proficient or distinguished on state testing)

The district moved to 1:1 tech devices, starting with a Bring Your Own Device model. Now all students have i-Pads. It is \$200 a year to lease to own. After 3 years, you own it. It is \$80 a year just

to rent it for the year. If you can't afford it it is free to rent or you can sell raffle tickets to earn money for the lease to own program. The district did away with grade levels- if a kid in 5th grade can do HS algebra for credit, great! Many kids graduate sophomore year and take college credit for \$50 an hour at the local college OR they become intern-teachers at the elementary until they graduate. For kids who are really struggling, the superintendent has lunch with them at least once a month to keep tabs and encourage. The high school is divided into career pathways. They give over \$10,000 in prizes to kids who score well on standardized test and they teach to the test. They also give merit pay bonuses for teachers.

The district started an adult learning program where they can get their HS diploma through a virtual academy. Local businesses hire adults enrolled in the program ½ time and then give them a full time job when they get their diploma.

For teaming and professional development, they get out early every Friday at 1 pm, BUT they provide after school programming for students which is run by the HS teacher-interns.

District culture is very important. As trust increases, speed increases and costs decrease. Because of the varied styles of learning and reduced discipline problems, the district needs fewer people overall than it did before making the change.

The district was able to get waivers from state lawmakers to allow them to do these innovative programs.

Resources to Read:

Every Child, Every Day by Mike Raible

Potential Actions to be Taken:

1. Get guidance on the new legislation in North Dakota which also allows for innovative education waivers.
2. Find out if there is any interest in piloting some of these other ways of learning among teachers and administrators and provide the resources to do it.
3. Investigate the possibility of renting tech devices to defray costs and still allow 1:1.

Second General Session- Arianna Huffington make some interesting points about how success is defined and that we need to focus more on the quality of life. She talked about her book "The Sleep Revolution" and taking time for self-care. She also reminded us to carefully consider school schedules and whether we are setting students up for success by holding school at times that are in line with the circadian rhythms for that age group.

On the Same Page: What School Boards Need to Know About the Core Work of the Labor-Management Partnership

Notes:

Partnership is union leaders and district administration working together to improve student learning.

An increase in partnership at the district level leads to increased collaboration at the building level. Increased collaboration at the building level leads to increased English and math scores for students. Better partnership leads to increased school communications. High collaboration leads to lower teacher turnover and higher commitment and attachment. Knowledge and innovation spreads to other buildings much faster through union reps. Teachers in schools with stronger partnerships are more likely to know about and implement innovative programs.

Benefits include a staff and administrative focus on teacher quality and instruction. Professional development is better received and there is an increase in peer assistance and mentoring. There is a greater focus on student performance because teachers and administrators are working together to analyze student performance.

The ABC unified school district in LA County had a teacher strike in 1993. After that, they decided they had to work together. The supt has been there for 28 years now. The supt and union pres meet weekly. They establish a set of agreed upon principles and behaviors. Each department meets with a union rep. There are union reps on every committee. They attend a partnership of administration and labor conference every year and discuss new initiatives and measures. The ABC school district has a labor/management institute for others to learn.

For this to work you need a disposition to work together AND skills. You should charter an agreement between the board and the union that you won't let each other fail.

Potential Actions to be Taken:

1. Consider a Labor/Management Committee
2. Discuss what actions could/should be taken to enhance the relationship and get everyone on the same team.

Engaging Our Community: Creating Our Vision and Community Support for PreK-12 Public Education
Notes:

Why engage the community?

It preserves the "public" in public education. There is inherent tension in the values and qualities of a community. Education in different communities will look different because the values of liberty, community, prosperity and equality are prioritized differently. These values frame our visions for public education. It is better to reach consensus and integrative solution rather than compromise.

Chart a course with Strategic Planning AND Strategic Navigation.

The board decided to start the process. They formed a steering committee at the district level. Then, they selected a group of specific community stakeholders including business leaders, social services, parents, religious leaders, health care industry, students, etc. This group of 50 stakeholders went through the public values framework and took questions back to their respective groups and got feedback. With this feedback, a series of meetings were held to develop the community vision of education. This "visioning team" continued to meet quarterly and visit schools to see the progress being made. The visioning process took 9 months and then the strategic plan took one year to develop. The vision is the heart and the strategic plan is the bones and muscles that do the work. The chamber of commerce schedule the meetings and took minutes. The process is more important than getting a product quickly. Having an outside facilitator is essential. The vision drove the next step- the strategic plan.

Resources to Read:

Preserving the Public in Public Schools by Phil Boyle and Del Burns

Potential Actions to be Taken:

1. Consider expanding community discussion of the future of the HS, to a visioning process for the entire district.
2. Consider reviewing and revising the strategic plan to reflect the community vision.

Transformation in Education

Notes:

We have to accept that we are preparing kids for a future that hasn't been defined. BUT we know that the future involves computer science. 90% of parents want kids to learn CS, but only 25% of schools teach it. CS graduates make 40% more than the average college graduate.

We know what good learning looks like- relevant, engaging, personalized but technology hasn't kept up. The next generation is global, social, visual and technological. They don't look to a teacher or wait to be taught, they just do and learn on their own.

What do we need?

We need to ask better questions. NOT what do you want to be? BUT what problem do you want to solve? What do you need to learn to solve that problem?

We need Purpose, Autonomy, Mastery. 70% of Americans are disengaged in their work.

We need to move education to a team sport- why do we teach kids that collaboration is cheating? Collaboration is how problems are solved. Kids need the ability to listen, give validation, give feedback, build consensus and influence others.

We need to create digital leaders. 82% of elementary kids can't tell the difference between sponsored content and real research/news.

We need a culture shift in the way we convert information into intelligence. Memorization comes through application.

We need student-centered learning. Technology is not a silver-bullet. It's a tool.

We need computational thinking.

We need iteration and innovation. Kids need to make, build and do things to learn.

We need design thinking.

We need brainstorming.

Google started with four computers. Each day is a new iteration, one lightbulb, casing, wire at a time. You can dump technology into schools and it won't change anything. Meaningful school change takes more than tech.

Culture eats vision for breakfast- if you have a great vision but a negative culture it isn't going to happen.

There is no resistance to change, only pain. Focus on the benefit, focus on the people who want to change.

"Build nothing for us, without us."

Resources to Read:

Google for Education Transformation Center website- free resources, districts share what is working for them

Phoenix Coding Academy

Richland 2 South Carolina

Inquiry.schools.org

Potential Actions to be Taken:

1. Big Hunt for Ideas
2. Talk about how we can recognize teachers. (at Google you can give gThanks shout outs to peers that come with a \$175 bonus)
3. Discuss other ways to encourage CS, innovation in schools