Board Retreat
Friday, January 30, 2026 12:00 PM

University of Oregon Portland Campus-Library
and Learning Center, Room 310
2800 NE Liberty St.
Portland, OR 97211

Agenda

1. Introductions and Stage Setting
2. Board Roles and Responsibilities
3. Building Coherence
4. Conclusion



The Science of Student Achievement

Adhering to Board Standards Impacts Districtwide Student Success

By Ivan J. Lorentzen and William P. McCaw

Editor's note: As a follow-up to the TASB XG Summit held in January, this is the second of a four-part series of articles on school board performance and its impact on student success, written by education management expert and psychology professor Ivan J. Lorentzen and educational leadership professor William P. McCaw.

Improving student achievement became the mission for public education more than a decade ago, putting educators, including school boards, on notice. Decades of research provided teachers and administrators with a vast amount of information to consult. School boards, on the other hand, had little to turn to. Already saddled with traditional duties such as budget, policy, and contract negotiations, school boards across America were challenged to find ways of participating in districtwide efforts to raise achievement scores for all students.

If student achievement scores are the ultimate measure of success for public schools, districts would need to identify the relevant factors under their control and align them in ways that benefit students. The challenge for researchers was to determine what these factors were. The challenge for school boards, administrators, and teachers would be to enact the measures found to be pertinent. Critics claimed that boards were relics of the past, were counter-boards were relics of the past, were counter-productive and even dangerous to students, and should be eliminated. Others argued boards held the key to increased achievement. But if it's true that school boards could harm a student's achievement, as the critics claimed, then it should follow that boards might also help. Because nobody really knew if or how boards had an effect on student achievement, it was time to end the debate and find out.



THE WASHINGTON STATE SCHOOL BOARD STANDARDS

The Board Self-Assessment Survey (BSAS) was developed by the Washington State School Board Standards Task Force in 2009 through a lengthy and sophisticated process. The development of the BSAS relied heavily on three substantive reports: (a) studies and publications by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL); (b) the Lighthouse Inquiry of the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB); and (c) publications from the National School Boards Association (NSBA). From these reports, the Washington Task Force identified and verified five essential principles, or Board Standards, found to have a predictive relationship to student achievement. These became known as the School Board Standards.

Each of these five standards is assessed by the BSAS. The published standards are:

STANDARD 1: Responsible school governance
STANDARD 2: High student expectations
STANDARD 3: Creation of conditions for student and staff success
STANDARD 4: District accountability
STANDARD 5: Community engagement

Further describing each of the Board Standards are 22 Benchmarks and 69 Key Indicators, which provide specific details of how they are to be enacted.

SEVEN KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Research conducted in Montana in 2013 used the BSAS to assess board actions (hereafter referred to as boardsmanship). Scores were then correlated with a district's 10th-grade student achievement scores measured by the Montana Criterion Reference Test (CRT) in math, reading, and science. While the statistical predictability of the findings is specific to Montana, the results are relevant to other school boards in their quest to increase student achievement.

The Montana study found that items within all five Board Standards were related with high student achievement at a statistically significant level. In addition, the elements of effective boardsmanship could now be prioritized and listed by the number of times the item was selected by the districts with the highest achievement scores (frequency). These are the items that most accurately describe boards that govern districts with the highest student achievement scores. If a school board wants to begin the journey to high student achievement throughout the district, then the order of seven key relationships between boardsmanship and student achievement presented here provides their step-by-step guide.

FIRST, effective boards hold the school district accountable for meeting student learning expectations (Standard 4) by evaluating the superintendent on clear and focused expectations. To accomplish this, boards commit to the following three actions: (a) create written goals for the superintendent focused on specific outcomes for student learning; (b) communicate performance expectations for the superintendent to the community; and (c) base decisions regarding the superintendent's contract on objective evaluation of his or her performance on student achievement goals.

SECOND, effective boards set and communicate high expectations for student learning with clear goals and plans for meeting those expectations (Standard 2). Boards that effectively address this second element (a) adopt a collaboratively developed district plan focused on learning and achievement outcomes for all students. A well-developed plan involves (b) collaborating with staff and the community to formulate and maintain a district plan with goals and outcomes. In addition, the board (c) bases its ongoing work, such as policy development, decision-making, and budgeting, on these district goals. The board also continually

monitors the progress toward the goals and outcomes of the district plan.

THIRD, effective boards hold the school district accountable for meeting student learning expectations by committing to a continuous improvement plan regarding student achievement throughout the district. Continuous improvement begins when the district (a) follows a schedule for the timely review of the district plan, ensuring (b) between the district plan and school improvement plan, and (c) that the board annually review and make recommendations to these plans.

FOURTH, effective boards provide responsible school district governance by conducting board and district business in a fair, respectful, and responsible manner (Standard 1). This is accomplished when the board commits to a clear and shared purpose.

FIFTH, effective boards engage the local community and represent the values and expectations the community holds for its schools (Standard 5). This is accomplished by (a) soliciting input from staff and a wide spectrum of the community, so that boards are able to (b) consider a diverse range of interests and perspectives in their decision-making to gain community and staff support.

SIXTH, effective boards model responsible school district governance by working as an effective and collaborative team (Standard 1). They (a) work with the superintendent to establish a commitment to student achievement. In addition, the board (b) pursues individual and collective professional development to improve board members' knowledge and skills by attending conferences and holding study sessions. Finally, the effective board (c) uses a collaborative process that results in well-informed problem-solving and decision-making.

The **SEVENTH** element of effective boardsmanship requires the board to create districtwide conditions for student and staff success (Standard 3). This can be accomplished by (a) providing for learning essentials, including rigorous curricula, technology, and high-quality facilities. Boards also need to (b) adopt a process that includes community and parent involvement in developing curricula. In addition, effective boards (c) create policy that requires rigorous and regular evaluation of curricula and supplemental materials to ensure that they align with state and district standards. A process to (d) support the evaluation and updating of technology is necessary, as well as the (e) development of a long-term facilities plan for construction and maintenance.

These seven prioritized elements describe effective boardsmanship because they received the highest number of statistically significant correlations with high student achievement. (Note: Standards 1 and 4 are repeated because multiple items within each of these standards reached statistical significance.)

OTHER SIGNIFICANT FACTORS

However, there are additional items on the BSAS that generated fewer statistically significant correlations but are still related to high student achievement. The following additional nine items deserve consideration by any board seeking high student achievement and are listed in no particular order. In terms of providing responsible school district governance (Standard 1), the board should do the following:

- Ensure the board is accountable and open to the public by setting goals for its improvement
- Respect and advocate mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of board members and the superintendent by using written protocols for its interactions
- Adopt policies based on well-researched practices that emphasize a belief that all students can achieve at high levels by focusing policy decisions on what is necessary for all students to achieve at high levels
- Promote healthy relationships by promoting continuous improvement throughout the organization With regard to setting and communicating high expectations for student learning with clear goals and plans for meeting those expectations (Standard 2), the board should:
- Articulate the conviction that all students can learn by adopting policies and taking actions, communicate high expectations for all students, and foster a culture of collaboration around the shared purpose of improving student achievement With regard to creating the conditions districtwide for student and staff success (Standard 3), a board should:



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- Ensure efficient management of the organization and resources by providing for evaluation of district operations to ensure that there is an efficient and effective learning environment
- Adopt and monitor an annual budget by seeking public input during the budget process and regularly monitoring the budget and fiscal status of the district.

With regard to engaging the local community and representing the values and expectations community members hold for their schools (Standard 5), a board should:

- Collaborate with families and community members by modeling cultural, racial, and ethnic understanding and sensitivity
- Ensure school board and district transparency through a process that is open and accountable by conducting its business in a transparent and accountable manner

The Montana study was replicated in 2015 using similar data from the state of Washington. The results were comparable. In Washington, as in Montana, issues of district accountability (Standard 4) had the greatest frequency of correlations. In addition, the order of the second and third standards was reversed, as was the order of the fourth and fifth standards. Both states told a similar tale regarding how board actions affect student achievement.

ACCEPTING RESEARCH FINDINGS

It is clear that the items listed above are not the obvious issues that might come to mind if trying to logically account for the difference between districts with high and low student achievement. And yet this is what research has revealed.

In addition, it must be understood that these are the things only the board can do. If the board fails to accomplish these tasks, there is no other body authorized to do so. When this happens, the school district is in danger of never experiencing the districtwide conditions in which high student achievement thrives. This is how boardsmanship affects student achievement scores districtwide.

IMPORTANCE OF BOARD SELF-ASSESSMENT

Until recently, school boards did not have a body of knowledge based on empirical evidence to consult. Now they do. The challenge for researchers was to make a quantitative connection between the Board Standards in the BSAS and student achievement. As far as we know, the BSAS is the foremost self-assessment instrument for school boards and the only instrument that is both valid and reliable.

IT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD THAT THESE ARE THE THINGS ONLY THE BOARD CAN DO. IF THE BOARD FAILS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE TASKS, THERE IS NO OTHER BODY AUTHORIZED TO DO SO.

The information generated by the BSAS is more than opinion. We can state with a 95 percent degree of certainty that the elements of the five Board Standards discussed in this article have a statistically significant predictive relationship to high student achievement. Boards that are interested in taking steps to improve student achievement scores districtwide are encouraged to seriously consider these recommendations.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED IS THAT:

- The Board Standards are recognized as encompassing the appropriate responsibilities of a school board.
- The best description of the difference between districts with high or low student achievement scores is contained in the Board Standards and related descriptions.
- If the school board fails to govern the district according to the five Board Standards, there is no other entity authorized to do so.
- While teachers and principals can affect achievement of individual students or classrooms, districtwide student achievement is the responsibility of the school board.
- Districts whose boards are committed to the Board Standards create the districtwide conditions that foster high student achievement.
- The list of Board Standards, prioritized by research, provides districts specific actions to take, which can then be tailored to reflect local issues.
- Boards that govern districts with high student achievement behave differently than boards that govern districts with low student achievement.

Next month's article, the third in the series, will address several board actions that have been found to hinder the chances of improving districtwide student achievement.

Ivan J. Lorentzen is an education management expert and psychology professor at Flathead Valley Community College. William P. McCaw is an educational leadership professor at the University of Montana.

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CENTERING OUR GOVERNANCE

Forging a Foundation In Service of Students

AMY CAST & SANDY HAYES

bombastic

OUR AFTERNOON TOGETHER

- Welcome & setting the stage
- Deepening understanding on the Board's role and responsibilities
- Building coherence for effective governing
- Wrapping up and next steps



The goal is not to be perfect by the end. The goal is to be better today.

– **SIMON SINEK**

CONVERSATION SCAFFOLDS

01 Stay Engaged

02 Foster Individual & Collective Dignity

03 Make Space for Everyone

04 "Yes, and..." over "No, but..."

05 Don’t let the Perfect be the enemy of the Good

BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

What we can learn from the OSBA Standards and research into Board best practices.



THE "WHAT" AND THE "HOW" IN THE OSBA STANDARDS

"WHAT"

01 Vision-director Planning

02 Community Engagement

04 Accountability

08 Learning Organization

12 Budgeting & Financial Administration

"HOW"

03 Effective Leadership

05 Data Driven Improvement

06 Cultural Responsiveness

07 Culture and Climate

09 Systems Thinking

10 Innovation and Creativity

11 Board Conduct and Relationships

"THE SCIENCE OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT"

What research tells us about the Board's impact on student growth.



The Science of Student Achievement

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Improving student achievement became the mission for public education more than a decade ago, putting educators, including school boards, on notice. Decades of research provided teachers and administrators with a vast amount of information to consult. School boards, on the other hand, had little to turn to. Already saddl... with traditional duties such as budget, policy, and contract negotia... school boards across America were challenged to find ways of participating in districtwide efforts to raise achievement sc... students.

If student achievement scores are the ultimate ... for public schools, districts would need to ide... under their control and align them in ... challenge for researchers was ... challenge for sch...

APPLYING WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

"Oversight Versus Overstep" scenarios



IS THIS OVERSIGHT, OVERSTEPPING, 'NO BIG DEAL' OR JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA?

1. During a board meeting, several Board Members have questions about expenditures that were in the budget they approved, including the purchase of new technology for the high school. Board Members are curious about how the money was spent, and they want to make sure that teachers are receiving professional development so they know how to teach with new technology.

IS THIS OVERSIGHT, OVERSTEPPING, 'NO BIG DEAL' OR JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA?

2. A community member stopped you in the store because they received an email from another Board Member sent from the school district email account, supporting a specific board candidate in the upcoming election. The community member wondered if this candidate's support was a stance the entire Board had taken since it came from the school email account.

IS THIS OVERSIGHT, OVERSTEPPING, 'NO BIG DEAL' OR JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA?

3.As the first budget was presented to the public, the room fills with youth and adults. It becomes clear that the proposed cut to the baseball program is going to create some upset folks. During the meeting, the Chair requested the Superintendent and business manager present a budget outlining various options other than baseball by the next budget work session that was on the schedule for next week.

IS THIS OVERSIGHT, OVERSTEPPING, 'NO BIG DEAL' OR JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA?

4. A parent stops a Board member in the supermarket and accuses his child's school of not providing the special education services that his special needs child is entitled to. The Board member suggests that this parent contact the special education director to discuss their concerns.

IS THIS OVERSIGHT, OVERSTEPPING, 'NO BIG DEAL' OR JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA?

5. Your Board just voted, and it was a split vote. You were not on the prevailing side of the issue. When you leave the meeting, a community member stops you and asks you how you feel about being on the 'losing' side. You indicate it was a horrible decision, and you will not be quiet about your disapproval of this decision.

IS THIS OVERSIGHT, OVERSTEPPING, 'NO BIG DEAL' OR JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA?

6. The Board is discussing the upcoming budget process at a work session. A board member brings up that there is no mention of district goals or the strategic plan in the process. They remember that during a board training presentation on budget, the budget should be tied to the district's strategic plan.

IS THIS OVERSIGHT, OVERSTEPPING, 'NO BIG DEAL' OR JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA?

7. A community member contacts a Board member accusing some employees of inappropriate and illegal conduct and demands that the Board member fire those employees immediately. The Board member indicates that they will 'take care' of this issue as soon as they can meet with the superintendent.

IS THIS OVERSIGHT, OVERSTEPPING, 'NO BIG DEAL' OR JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA?

8. A Board member wants a detailed, comprehensive report, including a school to school comparison, on programs that increase achievement at the elementary level and the data to show their effectiveness.



BREAK

"If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito."

CENTERING GOVERNANCE WITHIN THE COMPLEXITY



"TRUST MATTERS"



SOME OTHER VIEWS OF THE VALUE OF WORKING AS A GOVERNING BODY



GROUP AGREEMENTS

A conversation about how to support deliberations and build trust while governing.

- Think of a time when you felt part of a high-functioning team. What behaviors made that possible?
- How do we want to handle learning moments or missteps?



LOOKING FORWARD: PREPARING TO STRENGTHEN

How can we work together to **identify areas** in our joint work that are not aligned with all that we've discussed today?



CHARTING THE COURSE AHEAD

E = Excited About

W = Worried About

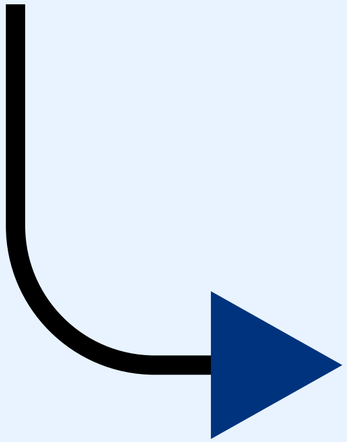
N = Needs More Information

S = Suggestion / Next Step



THANK YOU FOR OUR TIME TOGETHER.

We'd appreciate your feedback.



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