

The School Board's Role in Student Achievement

The school board has four basic roles in student achievement:

- holding high expectations
- supporting successful teaching and learning
- being accountable for student success
- linking the schools with the community.

School boards must hold high expectations for student achievement.

High standards for student performance begin with a common understanding of the best that a school district and its students can become. Each school board must ensure that the district has a shared vision that evolves as the times and the community's hopes for students change.

With that vision as a driving force, the board must seek involvement from the entire community in defining clear, measurable goals for student achievement. The board must be a catalyst to awaken interest within the community and bring input from the community to administration and staff. Using processes that cultivate input, the board sees that everyone has a voice in determining the educational standards the community sets for its young people. At the same time, the board must expand the community's horizons by ensuring that citizens have information about the skills that students will need.

The board must ensure that student performance standards are clear and easy to understand, not jargon. Clear, simply stated standards give students, parents and the community greater ownership in the schools.

School boards must support successful teaching and successful learning.

The real work of schools is done by students, guided by teachers. The school board must strive to create an environment in which all students can learn to their fullest.

A critical link in the board's responsibility to students is to assist the superintendent in being an educational leader. The board works through the superintendent to ensure that the district has highly trained, motivated teachers and administrators.

The board must create a culture of trust, with clearly defined roles of board members, staff, administrators and others who act as a team. While those roles may vary depending on leadership styles, management philosophies and traditions, the goal is a team in which expectations are clear.

The board communicates through planning, policy and decisions its expectations for continuous improvement of student achievement, innovations to improve learning, and monitoring of results. The board gives staff the tools to continuously

improve what they are doing and the flexibility to abandon the things that aren't working. All staff development must be rooted in providing better learning opportunities for students.

The board must insist that decisions be driven by valid, reliable research on what works in teaching and learning. Student performance must be the basis for all decisions on policy, planning, staffing and spending.

School boards must be accountable for student success.

In order to evaluate the quality and equity of education in the district, the board must receive regular reports on student progress toward performance standards based on a variety of assessments.

With the advice of administration and staff, the board establishes clear standards for student performance at critical transition points in a student's education. The board asks thoughtful questions about what students are capable of and how well all students are learning.

The board supports a system for monitoring student performance that is credible and on-going. An annual report to the board on basic skills tests is not enough. Frequent reports on student progress, as measured through a variety of tools, should be made to the board.

School boards must link the schools with the community for student achievement.

The school board must champion the needs and successes of students in the community. The board shares success stories and district progress with the community, engages the community in ongoing discussion, and constantly emphasizes the importance of high standards for student achievement within the community. The board makes it clear, through words and action, that student achievement is its most important focus.

Through honesty, openness and leadership, the board builds trust and support in the community for the needs of students. Schools need help in meeting the needs of children. The school board brings together parents, churches, business, civic and social organizations and government in a frank and ongoing effort to encourage each facet of the community to fulfill its responsibility to students.

On Firm Foundation

School board members who want to improve student achievement must have a firm foundation in the basics of being a good board member. They must be aware of school laws, be fiscally responsible, be able to work on a team, be leaders, be committed to openness, and a host of other responsibilities. But two traits are most important: School board members must be advocates for students and student learning. And, they must be lifelong learners themselves, committed to expanding their own skills and knowledge about education and board work.

