

# NASB News Update--February 2016

## News from the Association, Nevada, and Across the Nation



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### Supporting Success for All Students through Local School Board Leadership



### A Message from NASB's President



Thanks to each of the 32 board members who joined us for an afternoon of professional development on January 22 in Sparks/Reno at the Nugget. The training featured two nationally recognized speakers:

1. **Dr. Eric Jensen** focused on education leadership using the latest research from the field of neuroscience and communications.
2. **Dr. David Berliner** focused on the myths and lies that threaten America's public schools. He is the coauthor of a book by that name that the Board of Directors and Executive Committee studied in spring 2015. Dr. Berliner is a leader in debunking the myths, hoaxes, and downright lies that frequently are discussed in politics and the media.

Dr. Berliner's comments are at the basis of one of NASB's initiatives for 2016: Making Us Better at Our Jobs. This is a project that we will visit throughout the year.

This idea is based on a suggestion from School Trustee Cindy Trigg [Douglas] as a kind of "critical conversations challenge."

Each board will be asked to select one topic then have a critical discussion in their community that clarifies one myth or lie [based on those included in Dr. David Berliner's book: **50 Myths and Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools**] then report during a section of the Conference in 2016 about how this worked and what was learned.

Possible topics are:

- Dropout and graduation rate;
- Achievement gap;
- Charter schools;
- Pay for performance;
- ACT and SAT test results;
- International test score comparisons; and
- A board-originated topic not on the list.

Each board then will prepare a science-fair-type report to be presented at the 2016 Conference. The Executive Committee and Board of Directors will discuss progress periodically at joint meetings.

Another idea that I want to revisit is something suggested several years ago by NASB President Jim Lemaire. Jim described "The Board's Role in Innovation" recommended by Dr. Douglas Reeves, who addressed our NASB Conference in 2015. Dr. Reeves outlines a phenomenon that will sound familiar to most of us: The Law of Initiative Fatigue.

Those of us who are more experienced board members have seen this over and over. Every new initiative begins with a champion who sincerely believes that the new schedule or curriculum or teaching practice or board policy or other initiative will have a hugely beneficial impact on education. At the same time, what we have also observed is that many new initiatives fail and the implementation rate seems to be pretty bleak.

The idea from Jim Lemaire that I want to bring to your attention again is that we look back at the initiatives discussed in your board minutes three or four years ago and ask how many of those are implemented today. This idea isn't sexy or rocket science, but it will help us focus on what is important today.

We may discover that, as one initiative lands on top of another, a fixed or declining amount of resources has been divided among increasingly more initiatives, resulting in each one receiving a smaller amount of time, resources, effort, energy, and leadership attention.

Dr. Reeves advocates use of the implementation audit during which board members ask three essential questions:

- What is our initiative inventory?
- What is the range of implementation for each initiative?
- What is the relationship between implementation and student results?

I am of the same mind with Dr. Reeves that the board's role is to create a process that elevates evidence over

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untested claims, especially claims about student achievement. This is not about finger-pointing. Instead, this is about recognizing that every initiative begins with good intentions but we must more determinedly “notice” that there are too many priorities and not enough time to attend to all of them.

The implementation audit must focus on the questions that we should be asking ourselves again and again as board members. Again, these questions aren’t sexy or rocket science: “What is the evidence that you have to support this practice? What is the relationship between implementation and student results?”

If we focus on these questions, everyone will be less defensive about initiatives that once sounded promising and lofty but now must be terminated or scaled back.

I want to plant the seed that each Nevada school board should consider engaging in an implementation audit in connection with our discussions about budget development. The time is right. This does not have to be a major research project. Nonetheless, as we focus relentlessly on student achievement, doing so will build our capacity for making budget decisions in continuing tough times.

To quote Lou Holtz—my favorite American football coach and commentator—“If what you did yesterday seems big, you haven’t done anything today.” That definitely applies to all of the work that we do as school board members.

With warm regards,

**Joe Crim**

Joe Crim, Jr.  
NASB President  
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## The High Price of Superintendent Turnover

***The superintendent-author of Building Relationships, Yielding Results on creating productive governance teams that benefit schools and students***

By Julie L. Hackett

You read about them. You see them on the news. You watch them swoop down like superheroes ready to leap tall buildings with a single bound. Now and then you are persuaded by one of those crusaders who is armed with a school system turnaround plan and a bag of tricks that a miracle is possible. You secretly hope that this leader will be the one to conquer the perils of a public school system and live to tell about it.



Julie Hackett (left), author of *Building Relationships, Yielding Results*, finds involuntary transfers of superintendents problematic for the school communities involved — and especially harmful to student learning results. Credit: Taunton Public Schools, Taunton, Mass.

Then you come to your senses, remembering that most high-profile school reformers determined to put an end to the failures of our educational system aren’t performing any quick, major miracles. In fact, well-intentioned superintendents across the country — in places like Dallas, Los Angeles, Newark, Washington, D.C., and San Diego — are losing their jobs at unprecedented rates.

While crusader superintendents mean well, school communities and school boards often find their approach off-putting and, sadly, few of these school reform tales have yet to have a happy ending. Poor superintendent-school community relationships have created a revolving door in leadership, and ultimately it is our nation’s children with the most significant needs who pay the price.

### **Involuntary Job Moves**

From time to time, I search the word “superintendent” on Google or Twitter to see what I will find. Often I am surprised by the number of articles on school district leaders across the country being shown the door. If stories in the news media are any indication, superintendents in America’s “Great City Schools”—those urban communities serving the neediest children in the United States—are the most susceptible to turnover. Of course, some superintendents leave voluntarily for the promise of better salaries and benefits, or they walk away from their posts fed up with the antics of their school communities or school boards.

Perhaps most troubling is that when school reformers depart unexpectedly on their terms, the school communities are left to pick up the pieces, and students and staff suffer.

Involuntary transfers are problematic for school communities—and especially for superintendents, leaving them no choice about whether they remain in their school districts. A state takeover may be the reason for the involuntary transfer, but a poor

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superintendent-school board relationship is a far more common explanation for an abrupt ending to a superintendent's tenure. In fact, Jason Grissolm and Stephanie Andersen, co-authors of "Why Superintendents Turn Over" (*American Educational Research Journal*, 2012), say that approximately 60 percent of all superintendent turnover is involuntary, and friction between a superintendent and the school community or school board is often the source. So what gives?

School reformers crank out turnaround plans with ease, but they struggle to find ways to include the community in their reform efforts. The superintendent's inability to build solid relationships with the community and her or his board comes with disturbing consequences.

I recently facilitated a strategic planning session for a school district in the Northeast. The school district is now on its fourth superintendent in five years. The school board is deeply concerned that this discontinuity in leadership is affecting the district's ability to gain momentum on much-needed educational improvements. They are certainly not alone in this regard.

High superintendent turnover is an issue that plagues entire states, not just individual school systems. California recently experienced staggering superintendent turnover rates with 71 percent of superintendents in the largest districts and 45 percent of those in the smallest districts leaving their jobs between 2006 and 2009, according to a 2012 survey by Susan Frey, a writer for *EdSource Today*. Santiago Wood, who worked as a superintendent in three California districts over eight years, characterized the dilemma this way: "Superintendents are hired to be fired."

Indeed, a disparaging news media and a cynical public with little use for public schools appear to perpetuate the illusion that superintendents are destined to be short-timers. Is there anything we can do to change this?

### Creating Synergy

If we want to stem the tide against high superintendent turnover, we need public school reformers who will govern effectively by adopting relational mindsets. Superintendents and school boards must be able to work together to balance relationship building and results, creating a synergy between and among all stakeholders in the system.

Effective leaders need to stay focused on the kinds of school transformations that will improve the life outcomes for all students. In so doing, they must approach these reforms with genuine empathy, respect and compassion for the school community.

Superintendents who are relationship-building reformers possess an unwavering belief that educational reform need not be at the expense of relationships. It is quite possible to have both.

So what does relationship-building reform look like in practice? I have spent nearly 2½ decades in education. Now in my eighth year as the leader of an 8,200-student urban school system in Massachusetts, I have learned the value of building productive teams and enlisting them in school reform efforts. And we believe our students are better for it.



### Short-Term Struggle

A few years ago, I faced one of the toughest leadership challenges of my career. Working closely with the school board, we developed a plan to integrate more than 650 students in 8th grade from four middle schools into one high school. The plan included school closures, consolidations and redistricting to address budgetary shortfalls and issues of equity.

A school consolidation of this nature was the first of its kind for our tight-knit school community, and initially the residents and town fathers were furious. Name-calling and gavel-banging were frequent occurrences at public meetings. The consolidation would make Taunton High School the fifth largest high school in the state with close to 2,500 students. What leader in her right mind would even consider putting that many middle school students together with high school students?

But then we did what we now do so well in Taunton. We worked together, all of us, to problem solve and make the consolidation as painless as possible. We created community input teams and included students, teachers, administrators, school board members and citizens to address community concerns, no matter how great or small. We worked together to dispel harmful rumors, and we invited the public to several forums where we faced our most vocal opponents.

We listened—even when the feedback was hard to hear—and we demonstrated care, concern and flexibility by modifying our plans when it made sense. We talked about the financial benefits of the consolidation and

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explained it would help us address issues of equity for our students by providing greater access to the arts, athletics, science labs and world languages. We were honest about the challenges we faced, clear about how we intended to address those challenges and open to finding better ways to do so. In the end, the community got behind the school reform effort, and our students flourished.

After five years, community members now wonder what all the fuss was about in the first place!



### Credit and Blame

The key to substantive leadership is sustainability, which can be measured by the degree to which the school leader's changes live on after he or she is gone. A superintendent's efforts to engage the school system in bold educational reforms may be noteworthy, but they are not necessarily praiseworthy unless those reforms have a lasting impact.

Taunton's school reform effort might have gone another way had I kept the school board and school community at arm's length like some school reformers. Our school community was involved and invested, so we were successful. We all had some skin in the game and that is important. What's more, I still have the privilege of leading the same urban school system several years later, our students are excelling, and it looks like the changes we made together are here to stay. But not everyone agrees that superintendent turnover matters to student outcomes. The Brookings Institution, in a 2014 study "School Superintendents: Vital or Irrelevant?" contended "superintendent turnover has little or no meaningful impact on student achievement, and certainly is not associated with improvements in student test scores." An association with which any superintendent should take umbrage.

School leaders can't take credit for singlehandedly improving student outcomes, any more than they can blame themselves for poor test scores. But we can, should and do create the conditions to help coalesce school communities and transform school systems. The Iowa Lighthouse Study, launched in 2001, demonstrated this very concept by showing how the characteristics and behaviors of superintendents and school boards — in essence, their relationships — affected student outcomes.

**Teamwork is at the heart of school systems with effective governance structures, and superintendents undeniably have a role in creating conditions that matter for students.** If there is any doubt, just ask the communities still reeling from school reforms that never lasted.

### Lasting Change

Superintendents across the country are being tossed from their jobs, and we need to start asking ourselves why. People aren't crazy about change and politics are here to stay, so we need to find better ways to do this work.

Successful school reform is a shared endeavor, and relationship-building school reformers can work with school boards and school communities to make powerful, sustainable changes that improve the life outcomes of all our children. In the end, the best school reformers will heed this sound advice from British anthropologist Jane Goodall: "Lasting change is a series of compromises. And compromise is all right, as long as your values don't change."

**Julie Hackett** is the superintendent in Taunton, Mass., and author of *Building Relationships, Yielding Results: How Superintendents Can Work with School Boards to Create Productive Teams* (Harvard Education Press, 2015). This article appeared originally in *School Administrator*, October 2015.

## News from Nevada— Vacancies Continue to Leave Thousands of Clark County Students without Licensed Teachers

More than halfway through the academic year, the Clark County School District's teacher shortage remains stubbornly high and continues to have an outsized impact on disadvantaged and special education students.

The nation's fifth-largest district Wednesday reported that about 700 classroom vacancies, or 200 fewer than when school started in August, continue to leave thousands of students without a fully licensed teacher. More than three-quarters of those vacancies exist at schools with the highest share of children from low-income households. Nearly a third of all open positions are for special education teachers.

District officials stress that they have hired 430 new teachers since August, and about 120 countywide instructional coaches returned to the classroom over winter break.

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Nevertheless, a surge in student enrollment, especially in the elementary grades, has forced recruiters to court even more candidates as they prepare for the 2016-17 hiring season.

"We added five elementary positions just yesterday," said Andre Long, co-interim chief human resources officer for the district.

Mike Gentry and Long presented the sobering statistics about the current and future need for teachers to the Clark County School Board during its monthly work session Wednesday at the Greer Education Building. Among the more concerning bullet points: The rate of licensed teachers who leave the district has grown from 7.1 percent in 2010-11 to 9.1 percent last year.

Long, however, expected that rate to shrink, helped by provisions in a freshly negotiated teachers' contract that included pay raises. "We anticipate that (leaver rate) to go back down closer to the 7 and 8 percent due to the fact that the new salary schedule will be enhanced, and we think people will be more likely to come to Clark County," Long said.

He said more than 1,000 new teachers started working here after the state released money in July for a new incentive program to attract educators to poorly performing campuses or schools with a high share of low-income students. "When that money came along last year, most of the hiring was done and people were placed in buildings already," Gentry said.

"So that's significant that—even at that later date—over 1,000 people took advantage of that hiring incentive," he added. "We anticipate that will be significantly higher for this next current school year." The human resources division also appears to have refined its recruitment strategy as it tries to fill 2,900 teaching positions before school resumes this fall.

Last year, recruiters cast a wide net across the country, employing a "Calling All Heroes" campaign that included a zip-lining superintendent, superhero capes and a prominent billboard in Times Square.

"Approximately 140,000 (teachers) move every single year, so we know there's enough people out there to achieve success. We just need to figure out how to find them," said Gentry, who serves alongside Long as co-interim chief human resources officer.

He told the school board Wednesday that recruiters, instead of trying to attract any and all teachers, now will target two key populations: Educators with one to three years or more than 29 years of experience and who live in high cost-of-living areas. He explained that the new teacher salary schedule, median home prices in Las Vegas, lack of a state income tax and ability to collect retirement after working five years should

compel those teachers in those categories to flock to Clark County. "We believe we have a powerful story to tell," Gentry said.

*[This article appeared in the Las Vegas Review Journal, February 3, 2015.]*

## More News from Nevada— Instructor Sees Challenges for CTE Programs

Your parents' vocational classes at Churchill County High School barely resemble what was offered one, two or even three generations ago.

Although the name has been changed to Career and Technical Education, some of the courses from your parents' days have remained with a few tweaks, while others have been added because of the ever-changing technology needed in today's world.

Richards Evans, a longtime Churchill County High School educator in the vocational program, now coordinates the CTE instruction with a handful of instructors at CCHS. The local CTE curriculum, however, is not keeping pace with society's demands. Not only has CTE changed the landscape of instruction but also the number of class offerings and students has declined.

"We have some challenges," Evans said in addressing trustees at Thursday's school board meeting.

Evans then recited the reduced number of classes — many of them cut in half—that had been offered at the high school. For example, he said Ag Mechanics has dropped from six to four classes; drafting has gone from six to three classes; woodshop now has three classes; and photo offers one section.

"We are not offering or filling as many classes, and that is the challenge," Evans stressed to the board. "I would like to see us get back."

Incoming ninth-grade students and their parents will have an opportunity to see all the classes the high school offers on Thursday and ask questions about the CTE program. The two-hour orientation begins at 6 p.m. Although Evans cited fewer numbers of classes, he said another challenge focuses on qualified instructors. He said the additional challenge besides the number of class offerings centers on both the number of new and substitute instructors. He said a substitute teacher in one program has very little background in the subject, while the drafting instructor is a veteran teacher but does not have experience in the subject. Evans also said the culinary arts teacher will retire at the end of the semester, thus creating another vacancy.

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Evans also sees declining parental interest for their sons and daughters to enroll in CTE courses. Student enrollment has also played a big part in the changing dynamics of CTE instruction.

"During the last seven years we have lost 300 students at the high school," said Principal Kevin Lords.

Furthermore, he said the state has raised requirements for graduation among the core classes, and there appears to be a general apathy among students.

"Students don't know of the jobs out there and what they pay," said trustee Ron Evans, a retired vocational arts teacher. "You can make a very good wage as an electrician. Plumbers ... many of them are retiring."

Evans said the key to resurrecting the CTE program is to have counselors help students make good choices, which includes information on CTE classes. He said a possibility is to offer CTE classes at Western Nevada College similar to the joint effort with the Jump Start program. WNC offers college-level classes to CCHS students for dual credit. Because the State of Nevada has poured additional money into the high school CTE program, Evans said the state has raised the bar high. "Teachers in CTE are feeling pressure to perform," Evans added.

Dr. Sandra Sheldon, CCSD superintendent, said the state approves classes and the sequences of courses. "We have the option of what kind of courses we want to offer at the high school," she said. "We need to generate interest for our students to take these courses."

Sheldon agreed with Evans, saying WNC offers a great opportunity for students to take courses and in their senior year to receive certification.

Sheldon said she recently met with the CTE Advisory Council with the goal of informing more students about the programs.

*[This article originally appeared in the Lahontan Valley News, February 2, 2016.]*

**NASB Board of Directors  
and Executive Committee  
Joint Teleconference  
February 29, 2016, 700pm**

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### News from Quality Counts 2016—

The 20th annual edition of **Quality Counts—Called to Account: New Directions in School Accountability**—continues *Education Week's* long-standing tradition of grading the states on their performance.

A state's overall grade is the average of its scores on the three separate indices tracked by the report.

This year, Nevada finishes 51st among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, with an overall score of 65.2 out of 100 points and a grade of D. The nation as a whole posts a grade of C.

Diving into the findings for the three graded indices, Nevada earns a D in the Chance-for-Success category and ranks 51st. The average state earns a C-plus.

In School Finance, Nevada receives a D and ranks 46th, while for the K-12 Achievement Index it finishes 38th with a grade of D. The average state earns grades of C and C-minus in School Finance and K-12 Achievement, respectively.



*Quality Counts 2016* also focuses on educational accountability as its special theme.

The report examines how new state and federal strategies are transforming the assessment of school performance, and reshaping the consequences for poor results.

As part of this project, the Education Week Research Center conducted an original analysis of student achievement in the No Child Left Behind era. The analysis highlights results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress from 2003 to 2015.

It examines achievement, poverty-based gaps, and trends over time. To shed light on student achievement in the NCLB era, the Education Week Research Center averaged NAEP scores for reading and math in grades 4 and 8 to create an overall proficiency rate for each state and the nation as a whole.

The state's combined proficiency rate stands at 28.6 percent for 2015, placing it 44th in the rankings. The nation as a whole posts a rate of 34.8 percent. Nevada's 2016 *Highlights Report* includes results for each of the nearly-40 indicators that make up *Quality Counts'* overall grading rubric.

This year's *State Highlights Report* also contains the special analysis of student achievement in the NCLB era. *Quality Counts 2016* can be found on the NASB website in the section for Research/Data:

[www.nvasb.org/research-and-data](http://www.nvasb.org/research-and-data)

### News from NASB—

Three school board members will represent the Nevada Association of School Boards at the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Delegate Assembly when it meets in Boston in April: Dr. Linda E. Young [Clark]; Lou Basanez [Elko]; and Joe Crim, Jr., [Pershing].

These three outstanding board members also represented Nevada at the Delegate Assembly in 2015 in Nashville.

The NSBA Delegate Assembly considers and adopts the Association's advocacy marching orders. The Delegate Assembly is held immediately before the start of NSBA's Annual Conference.

Stacie Wilke McCulloch will represent Nevada as a member of the Delegate Assembly's Sergeant-at-Arms Committee.

