

NASB News Update--January 2015

News from the Association, Nevada, and Across the Nation



Office 549 Court Street Reno, NV 89501
Mailing PO Box 14855 Reno, NV 89507
Phone 775/657-8411 Fax 775/453-1017

Supporting Success for All Students through Local School Board Leadership



A Message from NASB's President



One of the best things that can happen in 2015 in Nevada is literacy. At every level, and in the life of every student, we hope for and expect greater literacy.

We learn from teachers and leaders in our most successful schools that a key to literacy is to encourage reading. In my new role as your NASB president, I would like to lead by example in encouraging reading. I plan to review a book in each President's Message this year.

This month we all have the opportunity to participate in a 24-hour professional development in Reno that includes for each attendee a copy of the book, *Schools Cannot Do It Alone*, by Jamie Vollmer.

Schools Cannot Do it Alone features the well-known "blueberry story," in which a teacher provides the businessman author with this epiphany: one of the most daunting, and most exciting, characteristics of public schools is that, metaphorically speaking, they do not choose their blueberries.

The author, one of many business leaders who has joined the effort to improve public education, observes that while the free market does many things well, it does not do *everything* well, and that improving the educational experience of our country's public school students will require more sophistication than a simple bottom-line approach.

When Mr. Vollmer provided training to NASB conference attendees here in Nevada in 2013, his focus was on one approach in particular that is complex, yet doable for

school board members: build capacity to work together with our communities to change our schools for the better. This is also one of the threads in his book.

"The First Rule of School Restructuring"

In *Schools Cannot Do It Alone*, the author makes note of pressure to change our students' learning experience to better suit the dreams, challenges, opportunities and realities that are before them in today's world. He also notes the coexisting pressures to not touch certain traditions and ways of life that are both at the heart of a community and inextricably tied to its school or schools. His "first rule of school restructuring" is to recognize: *You cannot touch a school without touching the culture of the surrounding town.*

The author acknowledges as well that the spots in which we touch our communities, when we either consider, or fail to consider, possible changes to our schools, are the tender spots.

"The Second Rule of School Restructuring"

Having made note of the emotion and volatility that can accompany decisions about our schools, Mr. Vollmer does not give us permission to back off, nor to walk on eggshells, nor to engage in political tactics to try to change schools without letting communities realize the tender spots that are in play. Rather, he issues his "second rule of school restructuring," a daunting, yet necessary challenge:

To unfold the full potential of every child, we must do more than change our schools. We must change America one community at a time.

He then describes some of the elements needed in order to overcome background conditions and human nature realities that may be preventing positive change or pulling a strategic trajectory off track.

"Prerequisites of Progress"

Here are four elements that the author asserts are necessary in order to lead sustained, positive change for our students:

- Community Understanding;
- Community Trust;
- Community Permission; and
- Community Support.

Each is described at some length in the book.

Five "S" Action Words

In the back of my copy of *School Cannot Do It Alone* is a handwritten list of five action words that begin with the letter S. These are the actions Mr. Vollmer recommended to us when he offered training in person here in Nevada. These actions, when taken by most or

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all of the individuals working together for change, may result most quickly in success. Here they are:

Step One: SHIFT your attention to the positive.

Put our attention not on the negative, but rather on what is possible, on what can happen for our children, and on the individuals and groups in our communities who are willing and able to help make our dreams for our students come true. One quote from this portion of the training: "What you put your attention on will grow stronger."

Step Two: STOP bad-mouthing one another in public.

Stop the badmouthing that accompanies a fight between free-market principles and public education realities. Stop the badmouthing that accompanies all fights. Stop fighting.

Step Three: SHARE something positive.

Be deliberate and timely in sharing both the inches and miles of accomplishment as students grow and achieve and as schools better serve today's children well, in today's context.

Step Four: SUSTAIN the effort and monitor your progress.

Sustain the focus on the positive by asking yourself as a leader: how many positive things did I say this week? Sustain community understanding, trust and support by reaching back to individuals who have reached out. Sustain relationships with parents, thought leaders, change agents and experienced educators by thoughtfully and strategically planning with whom you will spend your time each week.

Step Five: START now.

Get one, two, then all of the needed elements into play today, this week, this month, this year. Start cultivating community understanding, community trust, community permission to change, and community support. Start working together now.

Book Reviews

I chose *Schools Cannot Do It Alone* for January in part because it is an element of our NASB professional development this month. I can also say that Mr. Vollmer's book and the training he offered in Nevada have influenced me positively throughout 2014.

I have seen that the most effective leaders in our communities and in our state are good at the business principles of working together that Mr. Vollmer describes. He has hit upon what works in the public education context, and I recommend his book and not only this element of our January professional development, but all the other great training that will be available as well.

If you will be attending the 24-Hour School Board Member Orientation on January 23-24, I look forward to seeing you there!

February's book review will feature Yong Zhao's *Catching Up or Leading the Way*.

Happy New Year to each of you and your families—

Erin Cranor

NASB President [Clark]
702/266-6890



24-Hour School Board Member Orientation, Part I January 23-24, 2015

**Reno—Hyatt Place Hotel
Registration Deadline
January 15, 2015**



**Executive Committee Meeting,
January 23 from Noon to 200pm**

**Joint Meeting,
January 23 from 200pm to 400pm**

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PLAN AHEAD! 2015

**NASB CONFERENCE
November 20-21**

**NASB GOVERNANCE MEETINGS
November 19**

**Reno—Atlantis Hotel Casino Spa
Resort**

**Award Nomination Forms Available
May 1, 2015
Deadline for Submission
August 14, 2015**

Commentary— The Governance Conundrum

By Doug Eadie

Having written the first chapter of my newest book for Bowman and Littlefield, *Building a High-Impact Board-Superintendent Strategic Governing Team*, I was pondering how to obtain high-level practitioner input on the book's key concepts before doing any more writing. I realized that state K-12 associations might be a great resource.

Rick Lewis, head of the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA), and Bruce Caughey, head of the Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE), agreed to host teleconferences with their member superintendents and board members to provide me with input.

The two teleconferences validated that there is a tremendous need for practical guidance on building the kind of close, positive, and productive board-superintendent partnerships that are critical for effective governance.

Participants in the teleconferences agreed that my first chapter was generally on point in outlining some of the most important factors that make governing K-12 systems a uniquely difficult challenge and that, consequently, make a rock-solid school board-superintendent governing partnership even more critical.

By the way, a few participants in the teleconferences questioned my characterizing students as both the "customer" and the ultimate "product" of the K-12 educational process.

While I understand their concern about this unconventional and perhaps even provocative view of students, I think that this bifocal nature of K-12 students is one of the serious challenges that deserve mention in my first chapter.

Boards with a tough row to hoe

"You've been working with all kinds of nonprofit and public boards, Doug, for at least a couple of decades. Would you say there are particular kinds of boards that have an especially tough row to hoe—certain organizations that are really hard to govern?"

I'm paraphrasing the question a young woman asked a few weeks at a governance workshop I was presenting in Chicago.

It wasn't the first time I'd heard the question, so I wasn't caught totally off guard. I definitely thought it was a good question that deserved a serious response. I began by pointing out that doing a good job of governing any nonprofit or public organization—whether in education, health care, social services, or another sector—was a tremendous challenge even under the most favorable circumstances, requiring lots of thinking and planning.

I'd learned early in my career that getting a well-intentioned, dedicated, bright, and energetic group of volunteers together in the boardroom wasn't close to half the battle.

Good governing wouldn't automatically happen, no matter how qualified the cast of characters sitting at the board table. That said, I told my workshop participants that near the top of my list of difficult-to-govern organizations would be public school districts.

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School districts aren't alone in being a tough nut to crack where governing is concerned, of course. Based on my experience public transportation authorities and national trade associations also are high on the scale of governance difficulty.

But the governing challenges public school systems face appear uniquely daunting to me. For one thing, I can't imagine being accountable for carrying out a more complex, high-stakes mission than the one guiding our public schools. To start with, our public schools' primary customer—the student—is also the primary “product.”

Of course, districts have plenty of indirect customers, including parents and taxpayers, but the core customer sits in the classroom and—over the course of, hopefully, 12 years—becomes a significantly different person, at least in terms of knowledge and intellectual skills.



And what a customer: not only incredibly diverse and becoming more so by the day, but also in many cases a reluctant and sometimes even unwilling customer who would be anywhere else than in the classroom. And the ultimate “product” our public schools are expected to produce—a well-educated student—couldn't be more complex and difficult to measure.

Yes, school districts these days, responding to federal and state government directions, do a pretty good job of measuring basic math and English competence at particular points in their students' academic journeys. However, few would disagree that focusing on the so-called “basics” doesn't come close to accomplishing the full educational mission of a public school district.

Measuring outcomes

What about such notoriously difficult-to-measure outcomes of the educational process as preparing our students to thrive in a rapidly changing and challenging world? What about transforming our students into good citizens with solid values who care deeply about the welfare of the communities they live and work in? What about fostering the creative capacity of our students?

When we go beyond the barebones educational basics, what should be measured is just as thorny a question as how to go about measuring it.

By contrast, public transportation authority boards I've worked with over the years can be confident about the objective, measurable outcomes they're accountable for producing, such as ridership and on-time performance.

Trade association performance metrics are standard: membership numbers, attendance at the annual meeting and educational programs, and the like.

As if governing a public educational enterprise with such a complex, multi-faceted mission weren't challenging enough, political, cultural, and market-related factors make the work of governing K-12 systems even more difficult in today's world.

For one thing, school districts typically loom large in their communities, often making the Top 10 in terms of capital assets, employment, and operating budgets. Being one of the big community kahunas definitely has its advantages—for example, entitling your district to a seat at the communitywide decision-making table in areas like economic development planning.

But in these times of widespread and apparently growing skepticism and distrust of large institutions, looming large on the community landscape can come with a stiff price.

Unremitting, and all-too-often negative, public scrutiny can force districts to divert precious attention and other resources to aggressive public relations strategies and make fundraising (whether passing a tax increase or building an endowment to fund innovation) extremely difficult.

Despite the steadily growing skepticism and suspicion about the motives and effectiveness of large public institutions, it doesn't appear that parents and other community residents expect less from their local school districts.

On the contrary, the steady increase in two-career families means that we expect schools to handle a growing part of the traditional parental burden of character building.

The educational “marketplace,” as everyone knows, has become much more competitive in recent years, expanding school choice and forcing districts to demonstrate their effectiveness and pay close attention to public relations and marketing—or risk enrollment decline and diminished revenues.

[Doug Eadie is founder and CEO of Doug Eadie & Company. A contributing editor to the American School Board Journal, he is the author of 19 books on board and CEO leadership. This article appeared in the November/December 2013 edition of American School Board Journal.]

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Effective Governance: Ten Basic Principles of Board/Administrative Leadership Team Governance

Jim Huge has worked with a number of Nevada school boards—facilitating superintendent searches and providing professional development for boards. At an Orientation in 2013, he shared these ten basic principles with new school board members. They are adapted from the Carver Policy Model of Board Governance.

1. The board “owns” the organization as elected representatives of the community, to whom it is accountable. Therefore, the primary relationship the board has is with the community—not the staff, students or faculty.
2. The board employs a superintendent, with whom it shares the ownership, and to whom it delegates leadership responsibility and the day-to-day management of the district.
3. The only employee of the district who reports to the board and receives direction from the board is the superintendent.
4. The board speaks with one voice or none at all. Individual trustees or board committees have no authority over the district—only by acting as a body is board authority expressed. Once a vote is taken, the board has spoken and decisions must be supported as decided.
5. The board should prescribe the ends for the district, but stay out of the means. Board leadership is best expressed by articulating what the district is to achieve for its community, and evaluating progress toward those ends—not by becoming immersed in the day-to-day operation of the district.
6. The board holds the superintendent accountable for progress towards its identified indicators of success.
7. Performance of the superintendent must be monitored but only against established criteria.
8. The superintendent recognizes the board’s need to receive adequate and timely information for decision-making and for monitoring improvement on the indicators of success.
9. The superintendent must assume responsibility for engagement of faculty and staff in the planning and

decision-making processes, to the extent necessary to ensure ownership and successful implementation.

10. The board and the superintendent are jointly responsible for developing and maintaining effective processes for communication, decision-making, and handling of issues that may come before the board.

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