

# NASB News Update--June 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



For the June President Message, I want to spend a little time reviewing some key elements included in the presentation we heard from **Steve Lamb** [California School Boards Association] during our training on Saturday, June 18.

I was impressed with Steve's ability to take a huge idea with many parts about "Avoiding (or Resolving) Dysfunction in the Boardroom" and communicate it in some critical pieces important for us as school board members. Because not everyone was able to attend the training, perhaps having those critical pieces in our NASB newsletter will reach board members in all parts of the State.

The use of relevant quotations throughout the presentation materials really appealed to me. For example, several researchers have found that "as many as half of Fortune 500 companies have one or two dysfunctional directors." That made me see that the experiences some of us face on our own boards is not unique. Dysfunction is a problem that happens and can be addressed with appropriate strategies and alternative behaviors.

I was also struck by this quote from **The Politics of Excellence: Trustee Leadership and School District Ethos** which emphasizes the importance of the climate and environment we create in the district while we serve as board members—"A positive atmosphere yields higher than expected achievement at a lower cost."

Along those same lines, it did not surprise me to learn that research from Saatcioglu and Sargut (2014) supports the conclusion that "academic performance (eighth grade reading and math scores) is positively correlated with the board's social capital—trust, belonging, willingness to share." I know that I have heard speakers at the Annual Conference of the National School Boards Association stress this same idea. It is closely tied to the Lighthouse Study conducted by the Iowa School Boards Association several years ago. "Researchers found dramatic growth in student achievement coinciding with periods of high trust between the superintendent and the board."

One of the ideas that Steve discussed at length seemed to me especially relevant and is tied to public perception. "The best decisions are a product of disagreement and contest" (Harri Oinas-Kukkonen). In a climate of mutual trust and respect, however, a board can disagree while not becoming disagreeable. One key element mentioned is not to undermine each other after a decision has been made. We can still have a robust discussion on an issue, we can provide a public meeting in which our constituents are heard, we can still use data to make decisions, and we can still work continuously to support student achievement. It is how we go about this work—our attitudes toward each other—that can make or break the climate of our school district.

I found this workshop to be valuable for my own work as a board member and as NASB President. As always, I try to link concepts to the words of Lou Holtz—my favorite American football coach and commentator. In this instance, another famous coach John Wooden seems to say it best: "All of life is peaks and valleys. Don't let the peaks get too high and the valleys too low." It is my hope that we can apply the concepts from this presentation to the work that we do day by day as school board members—in the peaks as well as in the valleys, perhaps even reducing the number of valleys.

Thank you for all you do to increase opportunities for learning and achievement for all of our Nevada students attending all of the public schools in our communities.

I need to correct an inadvertent error in the May newsletter. Shayla Hudson is one of my colleagues on the Pershing County School District Board of Trustees—not the Humboldt Board.

With warm regards,

**Joe Crim**

Joe Crim, Jr.  
NASB President



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## What Good Governance Looks Like

**Phil Gore**

We often hear the terms “good governance” or “effective governance,” but what does that really mean? In 13 years as a school board member, board consultant, and director of board development and training, I have yet to have one school trustee say to me, “I want to know how to practice bad governance.”

Nearly everyone recognizes bad governance when they see it. Bad governance is when board members operate independently of each other.



We see bad governance when board members try to control one another or the superintendent. Trustees practicing bad governance believe it is their responsibility to tell others what to do; sometimes you see their ego even before you see their actions. Bad governance is when board members walk into a school

and start directing staff or make statements like, “I’m your boss, and you need to ...”

You know it when you see it. But what does good governance look like?

### **A Personal Example**

Like many staff at TASB, I volunteer at a local elementary school through our Partners in Education Program. Since I love numbers and have some proficiency in mathematics, the principal and teachers are glad to have me tutor some of the students who need extra help. My first order of business is to identify with the students what they need to learn and then turn that into something they want to learn. We’ll talk about money, shoelaces, cooking, football, swimming pools, what time lunch is—whatever I can identify as an interest of theirs.

We use manipulatives, white boards, clocks, rulers, coins, steps—whatever we can to focus attention on learning. Everyone helps each other. Usually four to seven of us are in one learning group. Quickly the students recognize my limited Spanish vocabulary, and they teach me so that I can teach them. They see my eagerness to learn, and all of a sudden they want to learn. They notice that I am interested in them, and they become interested in me.



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Often, I have only those first few seconds to get it right with each child. But as I model the behavior I expect from the students, they engage in learning the lesson at hand. There is no tolerance for demeaning or marginalizing behavior. Learning and teaching are a constant give and take where each of us helps the other.

Good governance looks a lot like a well-managed classroom—you know it when you see it. In a well-managed classroom, students know what they are supposed to be learning and are focused on those objectives. They know their roles and limitations, collaborate with others, and behave in ways that aid everyone's learning.

Good governance looks a lot like this, with perhaps the additional piece of supporting decisions the board makes. But that is all about respect, which is part of "behaving in ways that aid in everyone's learning."

Trustees pursuing good governance:

- (1) Know what they are supposed to be doing;
- (2) Focus on the issues at hand;
- (3) Know their roles and responsibilities;
- (4) Function as part of a team;
- (5) Speak and act for the greater good; and
- (6) Speak with a united voice about board actions and decisions.

We recognize this good governance when we see it.

### **Know What's Expected**

Trustees practicing good governance know what they are supposed to be doing. They come to meetings prepared to discuss, deliberate, and decide. No one is opening his or her board packet for the first time when he or she walks through the door. They have read their packets and background information in advance. If they had questions on the content of the meeting, they asked those of the superintendent and board president in advance. Questions trustees ask during the meetings are reasonable, rational, and expected questions that improve decision making.



When I served on my local school board, we had a fellow trustee who used to love to play "stump the superintendent." She would come up with the most

obscure, often unrelated questions that asked for details no sane person should memorize and ask them for the first time in a public meeting. Most of the time, board members playing a game like this don't mean to be quite as cruel as it comes across. We had several conversations about this over coffee and lunch. Today, she is one of the most responsible trustees I know. Sometimes we all just need a friend to take us aside and remind us of the Golden Rule about treating others the way we would want to be treated.



### **Focus, Focus, Focus**

Focusing on the issue at hand means that we are saying what needs to be said when it needs to be said—and in a way that it needs to be said. When boards practice good governance, each trustee at the table shares his or her thoughts on the matter. Topics are discussed; issues are explored; and disagreement is standard practice. This means discussions about agenda items take place during a board meeting, not outside the meeting. The challenge is that many of us have not learned to discuss difficult issues—where we disagree with the majority around us—in a civil manner. In good governance, however, dialogue is encouraged, and all voices are heard.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

Before my service as a board member, I had served as a substitute teacher in every grade, every building, and nearly every subject in the school district. My wife and I had a child at each level of the school system. I had coached boys and girls basketball at the middle school. And I was the pastor of a church that many of the district staff attended.

It was very difficult for me to learn my role as a board member; I wanted to roll up my sleeves and fix everything in the district. But I quickly learned—over the first two years—that that wasn't my job. It wasn't my church board's role to tell me how to do my job as a pastor, and it wasn't my job to tell the superintendent how to run the district. He was a highly trained, highly experienced, and highly qualified professional; eventually, I learned it was my responsibility to work with my fellow board members to set policy, establish strategic goals, and monitor the performance of the school system.

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Once we figure that out, we can begin to practice good governance. Fortunately, it doesn't take everyone two years to figure out.

### **Function as a Team**

Functioning as part of a team was one of the hardest things to figure out as a new trustee. I understood the concept, but open-meeting laws, community concerns, political issues, and mandated accountability contributed to making it difficult to know how to do that on a school board. I had to learn to count to four (five for some trustees) if I wanted to get something accomplished. It was more difficult to accept that everything had a process. There was a budget process, a planning process, a hiring process, a grievance process, a community input process, a scheduling process, a review process, etc. I eventually realized that practicing good governance was all about process—establishing and monitoring processes. And then there was the communications process.

### **Work for the Greater Good**

Trustees practicing good governance speak and act for the greater good. They *respond* when issues and concerns arise, but they do not *react*. Their response is determined more by what they want to accomplish than what they want to express. In other words, they speak not simply to be heard but rather to redirect the conversation in line with district priorities, objectives, and the shared and agreed vision of the board.

Speaking and acting for the greater good applies not just to our words and overt actions but also to our gestures and expressions. Watching a televised board meeting recently, I was disturbed by the smirks, eye-rolling, inattentiveness, and grandstanding. No wonder the kids in that district had serious behavioral problems.



What happens at the top of any organization has powerful effects on what happens throughout the system. We can't expect our children to behave in a civil manner in the classroom if the trustees and the superintendent can't control their own behavior and expressions in the board room.

Good governance looks like all participants on the governance team are respectfully paying attention to

one another and helping each other speak and act in ways that promote the greater good.

### **A United Voice**

You know it's good governance when trustees function as model citizens, valuing an exchange of ideas, seeking diverse perspectives, and acting in the best interest of others. Trustees practicing good governance discuss issues and concepts, not people and personalities. They listen to constituents' ideas and concerns, but they avoid becoming swayed by personal and special interests. After listening to all concerns and considering every side of the issues, trustees speak with a united voice on board actions and decisions—even when individual members may have been on opposing sides in deliberations.

Trustees practicing good governance function at a strategic level with a long-term view in focus. The board provides the superintendent with clear direction and parameters—speaking with a united voice.

Keeping these six principles in mind, school board members will find themselves and the leadership team functioning smoothly as a model of good governance. *[Phil Gore is Division Director of the Texas Association of School Boards Leadership Team Services. This article appeared in the November 2015 issue of Texas Lone Star.]*

**PLAN AHEAD!**  
**2016**  
**NASB CONFERENCE**  
**November 18-19**

**NASB GOVERNANCE MEETINGS**  
**and**  
**NEW BOARD MEMBER**  
**ORIENTATION**  
**November 17**  
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**Atlantis Casino Spa Resort**



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### School Board Members Are Active Outside the Board Room



In November 2015, **Carolyn Edwards** [NASB Past President, 2012, Clark] traveled to China with a group of 250 educators. The trip was sponsored jointly by the College Board and Hanban Confucius Institute.

Both photos above were taken at the Renmin Elementary School in Chongqing municipality which is in southwestern China. The municipality is home to 32,000,000 people and is located where the Yangtze and Jialing rivers converge.

The children in the photos above are in pre-kindergarten classes at the school. Students were asked to create a collage of classroom activities. In the lower photo, Ms. Edwards is helping students to place and glue their pictures into their collages.

In the upper photo, these students created the collages shown. The adults in the photo include Roger West [CCSD Social Studies Coordinator] and Wendy Phelps [CCSD Principal Burkholder Elementary School].

Ms. Edwards says that she learned that PE is done as a whole school activity. There may be as many as 2,000 students from a school lined up on a field all doing the same exercises at the same time in unison and synchronized. There are no special education students in the "regular" Chinese schools.



**Carl Brownfield** [NASB Director, Esmeralda] is unique among Nevada school board members in that he has worked as a DJ and programmer for more than ten years on KGFN Radio Goldfield, a nonprofit station.

For a number of years, he hosted a two-hour radio program, "Carl and Dusty's Radio Boogie" which featured comedy and bluegrass/American roots music. His current show is called "The Carlshop Show" which airs each Friday evening from 5pm to 7pm. It is a solo gig also featuring comedy and music, unless he has a guest on the show. KGFN is streamed 24/7 via its website [www.kgfn.org](http://www.kgfn.org) or by logging on to Tunein which is a free app for smart phones and the Internet.

Mr. Brownfield credits part of his success on the radio to all of the stories he heard while driving a taxi for twenty-one years on the Las Vegas Strip. That experience gave him a repertoire of tales about the human experience. He also owned and operated movie theatres in Minnesota for more than fifteen years.

In the top photo above, Mr. Brownfield is shown in the sound studio. In the lower photo he is accompanied by first grader Laura Hafer, daughter of Esmeralda County School District Board President Patricia Hafer. Laura sometimes stops by to help Mr. Brownfield as a guest host on his Friday program.

Mr. Brownfield has also been instrumental in the creation of the Goldfield Opera House, located across from the historic Goldfield Hotel, which opened on June 14 with its first musical performance.

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### The Relationship between School Board Governance Behaviors and Student Achievement

**Ivan Lorentzen**

*My interest in the topic of school boards is more than academic. I am a college faculty member of forty-two years and the director of the college honors program. I was a school board member for more than twenty years.*

*I've seen excellence and mediocrity in every sector, but at the board level the disparity ripples across the district. I've seen excellent board members who intuitively understood collaborative governance principles and who respected the office to which they were elected. And I've seen mischievous board members who seemed to create and relish disruption and controversy. This harm must be remedied.*

*Every newly elected official comes to the school board eager to learn the ropes and anxious to begin advocating for the changes they were sent there to champion. In my experience most board members admit to having been initially naive regarding the complexity and wide sweep of issues school boards routinely confront and adjudicate. It seems critical that newly elected board members quickly acquire essential expertise and come to appreciate the district-wide benefits of becoming a collaborative member of the education team. This will not occur without mentorship, training, and guidance from seasoned trustees and professional organizations.*

*If district boards are interested in behaving like other boards of highly successful districts they must at least entertain the idea that the board has an effect on student achievement, and begin to replace harmful behaviors with effective ones.*

**Dr. Lorentzen's research found that these twenty boardsmanship elements have statistically significant relationships with student achievement and success.**

1. Conduct board and district business in a fair, respectful, and responsible manner
2. Commit to a clear and shared purpose

3. Ensure that the board is open to the public and seek divergent perspectives in the decision-making process
4. Set goals for improvement
5. Respect roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent
6. Use written protocols for member interactions
7. Adopt policies based on the belief that all students can achieve at high levels
8. Promote continuous improvement throughout the district
9. Work to achieve mutual trust and commitment
10. Pursue board self-evaluation through study sessions
11. Set and communicate high expectations for student learning
12. Articulate the conviction that all students can learn and the belief that student learning can improve regardless of existing circumstances or resources
13. Continually monitor progress toward the goals and outcomes of the district plan
14. Establish policy requiring rigorous and regular evaluation of curriculum and supplemental materials to ensure they align with state and district standards
15. Have a long-term facilities plan in place for construction and maintenance
16. Provide for evaluation of district operations to ensure there is an efficient and effective learning environment
17. Seek public input during the budget process
18. Regularly monitor the budget and fiscal status of the district
19. Evaluate the superintendent on clear and focused expectations
20. Communicate performance expectations for the superintendent to the community

*[Dr. Ivan Lorentzen is a senior faculty member who teaches psychology at Flathead Valley Community College of Education in Kalispell, Montana. His involvement in the community has included serving as chairman and member of the Kalispell Public Schools Board of Trustees.]*