

NASB News Update--October 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**

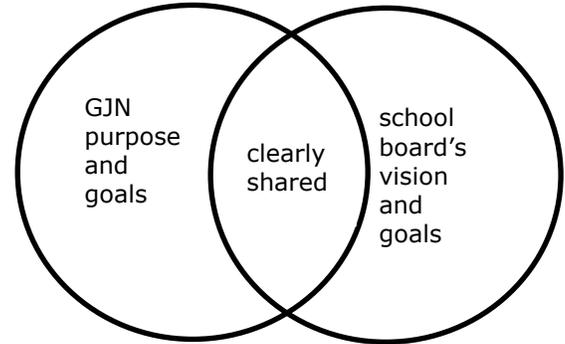


Greetings!
 Happy fall! As the focus on literacy continues, I am pleased to have been introduced to a book that may be of assistance to members of Nevada school boards who are seeking development of good policy with regard to transgender students.

After receiving questions from several school board members and learning that I had been given this book by a Gender Justice Nevada activist, NASB Executive Director Dotty Merrill suggested that I review it here. The book is **Supporting Transgender & Gender Creative Youth**, a collection of essays out of Canada edited by Elizabeth J. Meyer and Annie Pullen Sansfacon.

In choosing my focus for this review, I have employed a strategy that is useful whenever I work with individuals or groups who are asking for change. It is to understand the purpose and goals of the activist and to compare and contrast them with the vision and goals of our school board, to winnow out the parts of the activist's purpose and goals that are not shared with our board's vision and goals (similarly allowing the activist to leave alone the parts of our board's vision and goals that are not shared with the activist's purpose and goals), to communicate clearly about this, and then to focus collaboratively on the clearly shared vision, purpose and goals that we can pursue together.

I frequently draw a Venn diagram to help me: here is an example featuring Gender Justice Nevada (GJN), who gave me this book:



We will collaborate best if the work we do together is precisely focused on the vision, purposes, and goals that, to both of us, clearly reside in the "shared" realm.

Though there is not total agreement about everything among the authors of the essays in *Supporting Transgender & Gender Creative Youth*, repeated throughout is an aim for social transformation away from binary male and female gender, or, as stated in the book's conclusion, "the need to build a gender-creative world" (page 207). The phrase "gender justice" is in at least one instance in the book used as shorthand for this social transformation aim.

This review will not focus on that aim; it does not pass the "clearly shared" test any more than Nevada's current aim for literacy by grade 3 would be said to be clearly shared by GJN. In fact, using schools for a social transformation that is not universally desired could have the unwanted result of actually harming the schools' capacity for accomplishment of the board's vision and goals for the success of all students.

What is clearly shared, and what comprises the great opportunity before us as school board members as we seek to develop good policy regarding transgender/gender creative students, is our mutual hope that school boards can help create, redevelop, and sustain policy that supports school environments in which all students learn successfully, free from persecution and isolation, and enjoy a sense of belonging to their school communities that contributes to their likelihood of success. I add that I believe we also share a cognizance that creating and sustaining safe and respectful learning environments requires more work, skill, and sustained collaborative effort than many people understand. Among the difficulties is the fact

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that a strict focus on freeing one student population from persecution and social isolation can eventually (or sometimes quickly) place another population of students into the same jeopardy. An extreme example would occur were a student to misperceive an effort to create a welcoming environment for one student population as justification for persecution or even violence against a student who, during the course of the welcoming effort, somehow becomes perceived as a bigot.

Families who worry about this with regard to transgender issues include those whose religious beliefs and/or generational family values do not coincide with the social transformation agenda and those for whose children their biological gender is an essential characteristic of sense of self.

Thus the review will focus on what the book offers toward policy development in support of the school environment supportive of student success for all students.

Supporting Transgender & Gender Creative Youth

is made up of three general sections: clinical, education, and family.

By way of summary:

The **clinical** section asserts that treating gender variance (also referred to in various places in the book as gender creativity, gender-non-normativity, gender independence, two spirit, gender nonconformity, being gender atypical, or gender fluidity) as an illness or pathology is generally not helpful. It chronicles paradigm shifts in clinical settings and advocates for social transformation. It documents the paramount role of family in supporting transgender/gender creative young people.

The **education** section discusses legal developments in Canada and the United States and makes general suggestions toward creating safe and respectful learning environments that include safety and sense of belonging for transgender/gender creative students. It also offers some specific strategies for engaging collaboratively with families of transgender/gender creative children. This section refers throughout to ways that school systems could be used to further broaden social transformation, and it frequently advocates that gender justice activists seek these avenues.

The **family** section shares case studies and focus group and other research about what is experienced by parents of transgender/gender creative children and teens. As does the rest of the book, this section also advocates social transformation away from binary gender toward what is referred to as gender justice.

By way of review:

It was the family section, far more than the education section, that captivated my attention and feeling, and it was also the family section from which I drew the most practical and profound insights toward good policy development. In particular, chapters eight and eleven drew me back to read again.

It was also in the family section where I came upon the two chapters that seemed most decidedly social-transformation activist and thus least useful to a school board member seeking to develop effective policy toward the clearly shared area of purpose I described earlier. These least-useful chapters were nine and ten, neither of which I recommend.

Chapter eight is a research report by Françoise Susset entitled "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Experience of Parents of Gender-Nonconforming Boys." In this chapter, and in chapter eleven, I learned a lot about various degrees of non-normative gender expression and their almost universally negative social consequences, especially in today's schools.

One section is aptly headed, *gender-nonconformity in children: a dangerous place to be*. According to the author (and evident in case studies), a child, especially a boy, does not need to be anywhere near full transgender expression to experience harsh aversive treatment by both peers and adults. Boys, in particular, who stray only slightly from gender expectations (which toys or activities they prefer, for example) are likely to be dealt very negative experiences that are difficult not to internalize as a verdict that something is fundamentally wrong with them.

Parents and others close to the gender-nonconforming child are also commonly isolated or treated in one way or another as though something is wrong with them. Examples: sometimes with questions or hints implying some hidden family dysfunction, that perhaps the father is a sub-par role model, that the mother is too coddling, the opposite of either of these assertions, or any number of other hypotheses that are painful for those close to the child.

This complicates the anxiety that parents almost universally experience as they navigate the paradox between encouraging, supporting, and giving space to their child and attempting to offer protection and set limits that will hopefully shield the child from social and emotional pain and difficulty, and the too-often close danger of physical violence.

Case studies and broader research seem to indicate that in nearly every case, parents' concern for the child and pursuit of safety for the child trumps all other considerations, including the parent's own comfort.

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"Regardless of their starting point," one case study concludes, "the common denominator for these parents is an overwhelming preoccupation with their child's well-being" (page 115). Of consideration for schools, however, is the fact that some youth are homeless due at least in part to tension surrounding their gender expression.

One policy consideration that takes these family experiences into consideration is to find a way, whether or not they are adept at navigating school systems, for families to know exactly whom to go to and how, in order to make the requests they feel will help their children be able to succeed in school. Youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless may need a clear section of the policy all to themselves, which may need to be linked to any existing broader policy regarding student and family safety and relationships. **Both families and individual students "need to know whom [in the school system] they can count on, who will stand up for them, who will make change in the spaces and systems they move in"** (page 202). It needs to be very easy for them to identify and get in touch with these go-to school personnel.

Another reality that was reinforced repeatedly in both of these chapters and throughout the book is the uniqueness of each transgender/gender creative child. "Identity is as personal as a fingerprint" (page 200) was made evident by case studies and examples of gender expression ranging from only slightly different from traditionally expected gender roles to complete transition to another gender (or non-gender) identity. "Many gender-independent children will not want or need to transition to a new gender role" (page 34).

The policy consideration here is that one size will most definitely not fit all. Some families, for example, will seek the opportunity for their children to have no need to hide or limit their gender expression, while others will wish for the biological gender and/or transgender or gender creative status of their children to be kept confidential. Common requests may include use of restrooms and/or locker rooms of their gender expression, to be called by certain pronouns, to have a preferred name at school that is different than the legal name and possibly indicative of a different gender than the legal name might suggest. Good policy will not box transgender/ gender creative students into these as the only possible requests, nor will it restrict access to a caring go-to adult in the school system to only those gender creative children who have major requests to make, nor will it assume that every family and student will make the same requests for steps to take toward increased opportunity for their student's safety and success.

Also referred to throughout the book is the unpredictability of adult outcomes for a transgender/gender creative child. "As with all children, there is no way to know who a gender-independent child will become as an adult" (page 32). Because of this, policy may need to differ in athletic and other settings. Nationally, and with regard to collegiate eligibility, the trend seems to be toward allowing competition as other than the biological gender to be allowed only in conjunction with a one-time declaration that cannot be reversed without loss of athletic eligibility. Aside from athletics, lack of opportunity to make changes to requests or to inform the school of changes to gender preference would probably be unhelpful to many students and families.

Finally, **visibility, or, more particularly, a troubling sense of invisibility that is almost universally experienced by transgender/gender creative youth and families is perhaps the most often mentioned characteristic of these students' and families' experiences.** The policy consideration of this reality is to build proactive mechanisms toward the social, emotional and physical safety and sense of belonging of transgender/gender creative students in school.

In conclusion, this book is worth a read by school board members, even if only for the depth of understanding that can be gained by studying chapters eight and eleven.

I believe that understanding each other is, with regard to this issue in particular, key to good policy development. On a personal note, I want to thank the individuals I have come in contact with through Gender Justice Nevada both for this book and for the understanding I have gained by interacting with them, and I want to thank both GJN people and parents who have contacted me with concern for their children who are not transgender or gender creative, for allowing me room to identify that clearly shared vision, purpose and goals on which we can work together, and for allowing me to leave the remainder of their agenda to them as I devote time, focus, and energy to the opportunity, as a school board trustee, to pursue our board's vision and strategic imperatives for student success.

Sincerely,
Erin Cranor
NASB President
702/266-6890



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NASB 2015 Annual Conference November 20-21 Reno—Atlantis

Registration Deadline October 23
Governance Meetings November 19
Award Ceremony November 21



NASB Conference Keynote Speakers Present National Perspectives November 20— Dr. John Draper



Dr. John Draper has enjoyed a wide variety of experiences in his lifetime. He has been a newspaper reporter, construction worker, jailor, actor, timber buyer, musician, small business owner, choir director, soccer coach, Sunday school teacher, and door-to-door aluminum siding salesman. Dr. Draper will address Conference attendees twice on November 20, jointly sponsored by **Zions Public Finance** and **Oasis Online**.

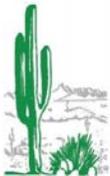
For the last 30+ years he has been middle and high school teacher, assistant principal, principal, Executive Director of the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools, CEO of the Educational Research Service in Washington, DC, and now serves as a nation-wide consultant with the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). NSPRA is a membership organization helping educational leaders increase public support for schools and school districts.

Dr. Draper earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Montevallo in Alabama and his Doctorate from Samford University. He is most proud of his doctorate from the school of "hard knocks" earned as a middle school assistant principal in charge of discipline for 1400 students. He has done keynotes for hundreds of school districts and education associations across the nation.

Here are some comments from those who have heard Dr. Draper speak at other conferences:

- *One of the best presentations I have ever had the opportunity to attend.*
- *John is an amazing leader and storyteller. This was the second time to hear him and both times I have come away with ideas and a brighter outlook.*
- *John's presentation was jam-packed with useful information presented in a timely and fun manner.*

Thanks to these corporate friends—



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November 21— Dr. Doug Reeves



Dr. Doug Reeves has worked with education, business, nonprofit, and government organizations throughout the world. The author of more than 30 books and more than 80 articles on leadership and organizational effectiveness, he has twice been named to the Harvard University Distinguished Authors Series and was named the Brock International Laureate for his contributions to education. Dr. Reeves received both the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Parent's Choice Award for his writing for children and parents. His career of work in professional learning led to the Contribution to the Field Award from the National Staff Development Council. For his international work, Dr. Reeves was named the William Walker Scholar by the Australian Council of Educational Leaders.

Conference Speaker to Focus on Generational Attitudes and Education in the Future



CenturyLink—one of NASB's corporate friends—is sponsoring **Randy McCrillis**. Randy is returning due to the popularity of his presentation at the 2014 Conference and with a new perspective on generational attitudes that influence public education.

Randy's work focuses on facilitating large organizational change efforts, guiding management teams in the promotion of systemic effectiveness and employee satisfaction.

He conducts team-building, personality-assessments, and diversity-awareness events for top level managers to front line staff teams.

As an external consultant he has used his consulting experience in the private, public and volunteer sectors. He currently serves as faculty/staff at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Randy has a Ph.D. in Leadership from the University of Nebraska; he has taught courses in cross-cultural communication, organizational behavior, leadership and diversity facilitation at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Rebutting the Rhetoric about School Boards

Elected school boards have been under attack nationally for some time, but a researcher is showing school board members across America that many of the complaints are unfounded.

"I am here to bring you information that will help you respond to what I call the rhetoric about elected school boards, and to share with you what we are seeing as we have studied boards in the United States and overseas on what kinds of things that boards linked to high (student) achievement are doing," said Dr. Thomas L. Alsbury, professor of educational leadership at Seattle Pacific University and the president of Balanced Governance Solutions.

His work shows that the elected school board is an effective form of governance and that school boards do affect student achievement.

For example, some have pushed for a shift to appointed boards, arguing that appointed boards would have a higher level of professionalism than elected ones. Alsbury's research found that, to the contrary, appointed boards are less professional because their members are chosen for political reasons.

Many also believe that school boards do not reflect the diversity of their communities. Alsbury found school boards to be "more balanced in occupation and socioeconomics" than any other type of board—appointed or elected—in the United States, including Congress.

"Are we as representative as we could be, no, but if the argument is that due to representation we should eliminate the elected board, then we should look at Congress and we ought to throw that governance process out," said Alsbury. "Every other entity should be looking to school boards and asking, 'How did you get so equitable?'"

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Alsbury edited the recently published book ***Improving School Board Effectiveness: A Balanced Governance Approach***. He is working with several state school board associations to develop a board self-assessment process based on effective governance research.

Dr. Alsbury addressed Nevada school board members during the 2014 Conference in Las Vegas. There and in other forums he has shared some of the qualities of school boards and school board members that have taken the balanced governance approach he has developed, based on his studies of effective school boards.

At the top of the qualities for school boards is a focus on teaching and learning improvement. "The focus is not on compliance and being directive and controlling," he said, "but on setting and holding people to high standards and instructional improvement."

Effective boards also partner with the community, use data to improve and employ innovation and creativity.

The most effective boards are neither a "benign cheerleader or a critic," Alsbury said. Rather, they know what the school district is doing well, where it is failing and how it is trying to improve.

"While we do not interfere or tell administrators and teachers how to do their jobs, what we do is have more effective, informed oversight because we know what is going on and what is not going on," he said.

Qualities of Effective Board Members

- Knowing how and when to engage in open dialogue versus open debate.
- Understanding that they should oversee without overreaching.
- Being driven by interests and not individual positions.
- Having a broad focus on student concerns.
- Appreciating each school's unique and shifting needs.
- Using their voice to reach resolution and reconciliation.
- Using power to ensure all voices are heard and solutions are reached through collaboration.
- Serving because of altruistic rather personal motivations

A Dozen Danger Signs

More than 90,000 men and women are members of local school boards in the United States, all serving as important trustees of the nation's public education systems. According to the National School Boards Association, these public officials serve on 13,809 elected or appointed boards. By contrast to the qualities described by Dr. Alsbury, it may be helpful to point out some of the descriptions of ineffective boards mentioned in current research from the Center for Public Education.

Ineffective boards tend to:

- Be only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives and seldom able to describe actions being taken to improve student learning;
- Be focused on external pressures as the main reasons for lack of student success, such as poverty, lack of parental support, societal factors, or lack of motivation;
- Offer negative comments about students and teachers;
- Micro-manage day-to-day operations;
- Disregard the agenda process and the chain of command;
- Be left out of the information flow; with little communication between board and superintendent;
- Be quick to describe a lack of parent interest in education or barriers to community outreach;
- Look at data from a "blaming" perspective, describing teachers, students, and families as major causes for low performance;
- Be slow to define a vision;
- Hire a superintendent who disagrees with their vision;
- Have little understanding or coordination on staff development for teachers; and
- Undertake little professional development together as a board.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards Program

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program is the United States' largest youth recognition program based exclusively on volunteer community service. The program was created in 1995 by Prudential in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) to honor middle level and high school students for outstanding service to others at the local, state, and national level.

The program's goals are to applaud young people who already are making a positive difference in their towns and neighborhoods, and to inspire others to think about how they might contribute to their communities. Over the past 20 years, more than 115,000 young people have been officially recognized for their volunteer efforts.

For more information:

<http://spirit.prudential.com/view/page/soc/301>