Arkansas School Boards Association

What Great Boards Do Differently
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• Two young fish swim past an older fish. As they pass the older fish, he says, “Morning boys. How’s the water?” The two young fish continue on for a while until one eventually asks the other, “What the heck is water?”
• The message of this fable is that we so often don’t notice the things that are most important in our lives.

• Great leaders see the “water” in their lives and jobs.

• Be keen observers and see what others don’t see.

• My business card...
What do you see coming in the future?
When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.
Tell the person sitting next to you one thing you would like to see the board accomplish this year.
Eye Brow Test - 15 Seconds
Brainstorm

• What are the strengths of your school board?

• What are the weaknesses?

• What do you think it will take to move you from good to extraordinary?
• Is your board ATTRACTIVE?

• Success is something you attract.
• If you want to attract quality people, you have to be quality yourself.
• Won’t attract great employees if you aren’t attractive.

• GO TO WAR FOR TALENT.
If you are an ineffective board, here is what hurts you:

• GREAT TEACHERS WON’T STAY WITH YOU. They will leave. They go where they’re supported, and so do good school leaders.

• Who stays then? You know who?

• People don’t leave bad school systems, they leave BAD BOSSES.

• They leave flawed leadership.
Homework Assignment

- Why would someone want to send their child to your School System?

- List 3-5 things that parents should know that would make them want to send their children to your district.
• If you are not excellent in some areas, where could you be excellent?

• Boards need to have their arms around the system, but no fingers in it.

• Don’t concern yourself so much with what’s going on, but what’s coming out. That’s what extraordinary boards do.
• When things don’t work, you have to tear them down and start over—That’s where you make ENEMIES.

• Can I vote on what’s right rather than fearing making people mad?

• We all love change until we put FACES to it.
• How long are you willing to wait to see results?

• If you define your expected outcomes, you won’t spend so much time on operations. Great boards spend very little time on operations.

• Remember this, you can’t write enough policies to fix people.
What Legacy Do You Want To Leave?

• Exercise: How do you want to be perceived by the public?

• Are there concerns, fears, or barriers that prevent you from having deep conversations about Results?

• It’s these deep conversations that will bring you the best results.
• If you ask any board member to identify the primary function of the board, and chances are good that eight of the first ten answers you receive will be “policy”.

• If you ask the same board members to list decisions they made at their last board meeting, 95% will tell you their actions had nothing to do with policy.

• The operational level is more fun and where we are most familiar.
• It all comes back to defining and obsessing over Results. (The hardest work with the greatest reward)

• When you see a great board meeting, what does it look like?

• If someone visits your board meeting, what would be their perception of it?
What prevents boards from performing better?

- Lack of clear focus
- Role Confusion
- Multiple and competing drivers of actions
- Useless policy
- Reactive orientation
- “Fix-it” mentality

- End result- Inability to make a difference
Ask yourself these questions from time to time:

- Why do I want to be on the board?
- What do I contribute as a board member?
- What talents do I have other members don’t have?
- How could I be a better board member?
- If I left the board today, will I be missed?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a board member?
- How do you know you are a good board member?
• TASB- The biggest influence boards have are at the high school levels.

• Data driven doesn’t answer the WHY. That’s where we butt heads.

• Focus on impact, ignore the noise.
Don’t Be A DOT Chaser!
• The board tries to stay on TOP of things. Never happens. Just works you to death.

• You start asking for reports, subdivide into groups, and wind up with 4-5 mini boards.

• Can’t know everything going on. Extraordinary boards don’t try.
• Your goal should be fewer policies, not more.

• Average boards are DOT chasers.

• Extraordinary boards don’t get into the dots.

• Dots are fascinating, but they easily DISTRACT us.
Great governance is not about doing 1,000 things, but doing 10 things well.
Mission Statement - What is it?

• Tell me your mission statement without looking it up.

• Mission statements are the "how-to" statements or action plans that help schools achieve their vision.

• Do you read it at the start of each board meeting?
• Great boards FOCUS on the things that matter.

• They focus on the MISSION of the district and asks the questions:
  1. Are the students learning
  2. How do we know the students are learning

When you focus on the end result rather than the how, great things happen.
• Special interest groups will force you to make bad decisions and make you look bad.

• You need people to take what you have and take you higher with it.

• Do you believe you can go to the next level of academic excellence?
• Research revealed that low performing communities want QUICK fixes and super human things done and they pressure board members to get it done- and failure is the result.

• In education, there is no such thing as a quick fix.
Recent research showed that 88% of the board members in districts being taken over by the state rated their performance highly successful.
Center for Board Behavior Reform

• What we do to fix boards.

• Does your board speak with one voice?

• Do you have a specific plan for improvement or a vision, or a dream?

• Do you have a rogue board member?
What We do:

• Do preliminary 2 hour board training.

• Video your meetings.

• Give you one-on-one coaching as to how you can be a peak performer during the meetings.

• Provide immediate feedback as to your effectiveness at the meeting.
• Monitor your behavior and provide one-on-one coaching for an entire year.

• At the end of this time, you will see a tremendous improvement in the quality of your board meetings.

• Success is GUARANTEED.
• David.e.lee@usm.edu-----601-303-0416
• There are tons of research out there on what good boards do, don’t do, should do, average age, education level, occupations, average length of service on a board, etc.. The list goes on....

• Researchers will tell you it is hard to conduct research on boards, as our previous study showed us.

• Most of the studies out there are not researched based, even the Lighthouse Study you read about.
Pay Attention
Here is what we often see:
How do you perceive these individuals?
What Really Great Boards Do Differently

• They know you can’t manage your way out of bad governance.

• They know you need to have your arms around the system, but no fingers in it.

• Don’t concern themselves too much with what’s going on, but rather what’s coming out. Results focused, not Reports focused.
1. Good Boards Adhere to The Law of The Shield.

- Protects you from your critics and naysayers.

- Stand together by locking your armor and working as a team.

- Don’t have to vote unanimously, but do have to agree to support the majority vote. If you pull away from the group, CHAOS begins to rule.
2. Great Boards Don’t Allow Big Egos To Rule Their Meetings

- Big egos sink ships, so they say.
- Ego’s much be checked at the door.
- Your ego is not your Amigo.
- The bigger your ego, the less you can see.
3. Great Boards Don’t Accept Things at Face Value.

• They refuse to accept things just because they are told, “we have no choice”. There are always more choices.

• We see boards back off when they hear that.

• The big ”WHY” question is your great equalizer.

• Great boards turn a no into their advantage.

- Many great boards realize there are too many rules and regulations keeping them from achieving their goals.

- Most rules are designed to keep us in a “BOX”.

- Real growth won’t be found in a box. Stretch the limits.

- Departments of Education are designed to say “NO”
5. Great Boards Remove Barriers That Limit Their Progress.

• Subtract people not performing well and get rid of programs not working.

• YOU CAN’T OUTWORK BAD LEADERSHIP.

• Find out what works and focus on that. Focus on strengths instead of constantly trying to fix weaknesses.
Great Boards Look For Their Inches.

- Big results are hard to come by, so great boards look for small things that add up.
- Don’t wait on the homerun. Create small successes.
- These inches will help you get through difficult times.
7. Great Boards Have A System For Doing Things.

• Edward Deming said, “94% of the failure we experience is the result of the system, not the people.”

• All great boards work from within a system of beliefs and performance.

• This prevents boards from constantly blaming others for their shortcomings. Your system is perfectly designed to get the results you are getting.
8. Great Boards Follow the Rule of One.

- One board, many voices, but ultimately ONE VOICE.
- If you speak with one voice, you can survive any obstacle that comes your way.
- Don’t allow your critics to separate your voices.
- If they see a chink in your armor, you are doomed.
• Great boards obsess about the end results.

• Board member told me she didn’t care how they get the results, as long as they are legal and within board policies, as long as they get them.
• Board’s most important question is not “What are we doing?” but rather “Is what we’re doing getting the desired results—and how do we know?”

• Goals with predetermined indicators of success will let the board know.
• There is no magic pill you don’t know about.

• There are good strategies poorly executed, poor strategies executed well, but rarely is there a truly new, revolutionary strategy.

• The issue is execution, not innovation.
• Many think boards are a thing of the past.

• What do you think?

• You will be evaluated soon, so the question is “who will do it”.

• You are now in the Crosshairs.
• Key****The most ineffective, and hard to deal with, board member is one who comes on the board with the intention of representing THEIR area. You have to represent the system, not one segment.

• If you operate in a fish bowl, don’t let that become your “ThinkTank”.

• Find out what the best do and duplicate it.
It is the board’s responsibility to ensure that its expectations (goals) are clearly communicated to the superintendent.

Working closely with the superintendent, the board:

1. Establishes goals
2. Establishes objective measurements/criteria (data indicators of success) for each goal so the board can determine if the goals have been accomplished.
• Example of a board goal: “Student achievement will increase next year.”

• Example of data indicators that will objectively let the board know if the goal has been achieved.
• Reviews and discusses these strategies at a board meeting and either reject, or give formal approval.

• Once approved, the board now begins monitoring the results, not the processes.

• All great boards do these things. Not rocket science.
• Everyone has goals to increase student achievement. But, great boards monitor the indicators of success.

• Your district goal update should be integrated in to your board’s monthly agenda. Ask:
• 1. Are our student achievement goals being accomplished, and
• 2. How do we objectively know this (show us the data).
• I love the "straight line" concept. A quick look is all you need. Narratives take too long and can easily be misinterpreted.

• To make it easy to understand, colors on graphs and charts should be used. Red-Danger—Orange-Caution---Green-Go/good.

• You must have a Goal, Strategy Section, and Approximate cost.

• You have to TRUST each other.
• We’ve observed boards all over America. The great ones always do this.

• In fact, their meetings are quite boring. The stick to business.

• Some boards are the greatest show in town, and if yours is, watch out.
• “All too often, school board members are like firefighters on the ground, battling the flames when they should be in a helicopter above the fire, able to see how extensive the blaze is, which way the wind is blowing and where the resources need to be deployed.”

• Massive teamwork is required for great boards to operate. That will be your lifeline.
• We see personalities, power struggles, and politics in every meeting. These are good if you use them the right way.

• Can you vote for what’s right rather than what is popular? We often see boards buckle when community interest groups come to meetings.

• We see many board members trying to promote themselves in an effort to get re-elected or appointed. Why? You will do your best work when you don’t mind if you are not re-appointed.
• That means adhere to the CONFIDENTIALITY rule. What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas, so it is in the board room.

• Nothing will undermine your ability to function at a high level, is loose lips.

• One voice is your goal. As team players, you have to respect each other’s opinions, beliefs, etc., but these aren’t to be shared with other folks.
• This also goes for the superintendent. Absolute confidentiality must be the rule to follow. Never tell others what board members say, unless the remark was in a public meeting.
What Are The Elephants In Your Boardroom?
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• How do you want to be perceived by the public?

• When others talk about you, what do you want them to say?

• Suggestion: FOCUS ON THE IMPACT, IGNORE THE NOISE.

• If your system isn’t where you want it, whose fault is it?
Thank You!

For more information on board training and research, please email:

- David.e.lee@usm.edu---boardsthatwork.org

- PHONE: 601-303-0416