



## WASB GoLD Staff Answers Your Questions

### Q. How does a school board demonstrate high trust leadership?

**A.** As a member of the WASB Governance and Leadership Development (GoLD) team, I field my share of questions about trust: How do we rebuild trust on the board after a nasty election? How do we learn to trust this new superintendent? What should we do about angry parents who don't trust us anymore? How do we learn to trust our community again after a failed referendum that we were sure was going to pass?

Unfortunately, there is probably no quality or characteristic that is as rare as trust, either."

Districts reaching out to the WASB for help with trust are not alone. That may be bad news in this moment, but it also has an upside.

### Trust can be built

I can't do much to boost my height by 4 inches, but if I'm committed to building greater trust in service of student achievement, I'm in luck. There are real, concrete, practical steps I can take to fulfill on that commitment.

The tricky thing about trust is that it's both reciprocal and incremental. What that means in real life is that you have to give it to get it and build it one step at a time. One of the best places to start is with a shared vocabulary.

Whether you adopt simple practices like Group Agreements and the Ladder of Inference (introduced at the WASB Presidents/Leadership Conference last July) or explore Stephen M. R. Covey's "13 Behaviors of a High Trust Leader" (sidebar), keep these points in mind:

- **LEADERS GO FIRST.** You have to give trust to get it. You may not know in advance if your new approach will work, but if the situation you've got right now is unacceptable, give something else a good-faith try.
- **LEADERS LEARN.** The GoLD team is continuously turning the latest proven practices into learning opportunities for you

and your board. How can we help you put these trust practices to work for your district?

- **LEADERS ENCOURAGE.** If at first the rest of your team doesn't succeed (or even buy into trying something new), maybe there's something in the way. What can you do to calm fears, overcome objections or support new behaviors?
- **LEADERS SEEK SUPPORT.** Building trust doesn't have to be hard, but it does take commitment and courage. Boosting trust in your district may call for you to stick your neck out a bit, but you don't have to go it alone. Remember, the GoLD team is available to support you and your board as you undertake this very important work. ■

*A.B. Orlik, GoLD consultant*

### This Column is for YOU!

**Each issue,** a member of the WASB Governance and Leadership Development (GoLD) Team answers member questions about board governance. Submit your question by visiting the WASB website, [wasb.org](http://wasb.org). Click on the "GoLD" tab and then select "Governance Questions" at the bottom of the page. Complete the form and your question may appear in the *Wisconsin School News*.

### Why all this concern about trust?

Because the level of trust in an educational system influences, among other things, whether students regularly attend school, whether educators are willing to experiment with new practices and engage with parents, and whether districts are successful in closing the achievement gap.

It turns out that high trust strongly predicts positive student outcomes.

"I've come to one inescapable conclusion," writes best-selling author Patrick Lencioni in *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. "No quality or characteristic is more important than trust. Unfor-

### The 13 Behaviors of a High Trust Leader

*Stephen M. R. Covey*

1. Talk straight
2. Demonstrate respect
3. Create transparency
4. Right wrongs
5. Show loyalty
6. Deliver results
7. Get better
8. Confront reality
9. Clarify expectations
10. Practice accountability
11. Listen first
12. Keep commitments
13. Extend trust