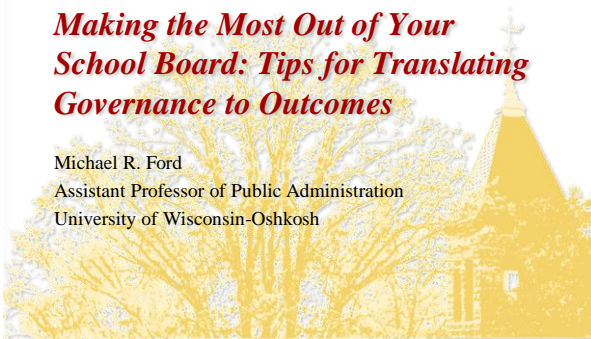


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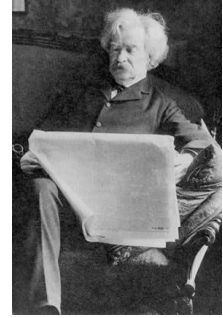
Making the Most Out of Your School Board: Tips for Translating Governance to Outcomes

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Mark Twain

- ❖ In the first place God made idiots. This was for practice. Then he made School Boards.



Opinions

The Problem of the American School Board

- ❖ Everyone has an opinion.
- ❖ Many critics.
- ❖ Problem of Democracy.
- ❖ Increase in publicly funded schools not under board authority.
- ❖ Limited scope of authority.
- ❖ Tasked with the impossible.
- ❖ Misconceptions.

- ❖ Everyone is exposed to school boards as a:
 - ❖ Student
 - ❖ Taxpayer
 - ❖ Parent

The Critics

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- ❖ Matt Miller: “Incompetent school boards and union dominance.”
- ❖ Checker Finn Jr.: An accident of history.
- ❖ Paul Hill:
 - ❖ Not truly democratic.
 - ❖ Dysfunctional.

The Problem of Democracy

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- ❖ What is the main qualification to be a school board member?
- ❖ Example of Boston school start times.

Non-Democratic Governance

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- ❖ Vouchers and ESAs
- ❖ Independent charter schools
- ❖ Portfolio model
- ❖ Mayoral control systems

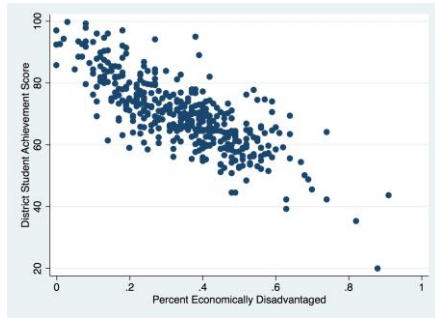
- ❖ Growing in Wisconsin

Limited Scope of Authority

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- ❖ Fiscal side: Revenue limits
- ❖ Academic side: State mandates

A Difficult Task



Misconceptions

- ❖ About what school boards do.
- ❖ About their scope of authority: What is your tax levy really a function of?
- ❖ About who serves and why?

But What Do We Really Know?

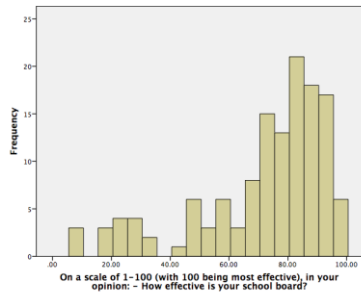
- ❖ What is a school board, at its most basic?
 - ❖ A group of people engaged in governance.
 - ❖ Some likely work well, some likely do not work well.
- ❖ Can we really say all 423 Wisconsin schools board don't and/or can't work?

Why Do School Boards Matter?

- ❖ Democratic legitimacy.
- ❖ Local control.
 - ❖ Bridge between values and actions.
- ❖ A forum to debate wicked problems.
- ❖ An accountability mechanism.
- ❖ Their ability to impact student outcomes.

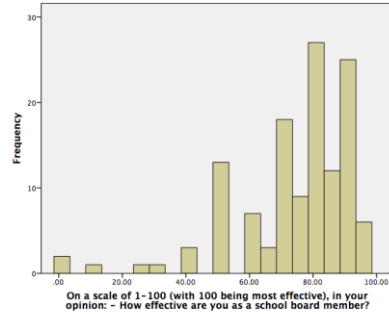
State of Wisconsin School Boards

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State of Wisconsin School Boards

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Who Serves?

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- ❖ 58.5% Male, 31.4% Female
- ❖ Overwhelmingly White
- ❖ About 50% identify as moderate

What Do They Care About?

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Strategic Planning	3.15
Setting Academic Standards	3.44
Monitoring Fiscal Performance	3.54
Holding School Staff Accountable for District Performance	5.51
Hiring the Superintendent	5.79
Making Assessment Policies	5.8
Making Student Behavior Policies	6.3
Interacting with the Public	6.36
Board Development	7.35
Collaborating with Interest Groups	7.76

Defining Success as a Board

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- ♦ A board that is **not afraid of new things**/changes A board that places or children before the teaching staff requests. A board that will see the changes coming before they happen
- ♦ Seven **good listeners** who have time to read quite a bit and care about children
- ♦ All decisions are designed to **maximize student achievement**.
- ♦ A mix of personalities and backgrounds **More than just well-intentioned** - they want to drive change
- ♦ One that **focuses on policy and then allows administration to handle the daily operations**.
- ♦ A board which adheres to the philosophy of "student first", manages the finances of the organization according to need and taxpayer willingness to pay, is willing to **support the needs of the district publicly**, treats all staff with dignity and respect, encourages reasonable risk taking of staff members and finally and most importantly, **lets the Superintendent do their job without micro-managing** them.
- ♦ A board that reads and researches all materials, is committed to the students and staff of the district, **leaves personal feelings at the door**, can operate in a solid process environment, works collaboratively with the superintendent and sets goals with action plans to work at improvement in the district
- ♦ Focuses on and continuously improves in the 5 functions outlined in the **Key Work of School Boards**: vision, policy, accountability, community engagement and relationships. A good board stays out of the way of the district administrator and staff so they can perform their professional duties.

Challenges

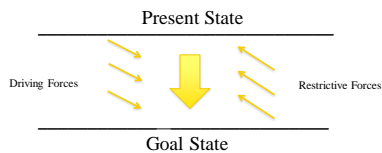
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- ♦ **Declining enrollment**
- ♦ **Retention of quality staff**. Class size.
- ♦ We are struggling with a rising number of students struggling with **mental health**.
- ♦ **Referendum debate**. liberal taxation verses conservative appropriate taxation
- ♦ **State funding formula**, impact on finances of voucher & charter schools receiving tax dollars at the expense of public schools (or at least **giving the appearance to property tax payers they are paying more for public schools when in fact the money is going to private schools**).
- ♦ Too much attempts by DPI and Department of Education to set standards, and **interfere with the proper duties of the board**. 2. Too much reliance on administrators to set goals, rather than set goals and have administrators accountable to achieve them. 3. **A fear of debating things openly out in front of the community before deciding**.
- ♦ **Predictability of student success based on demographics**. Overcoming obstacles and removing barriers to success for students. Failure to go from "good to great" schools where every student can be successful regardless of their background. Demonstrating support for all staff. Lack of government support for public schools and **local control**.
- ♦ A **shifting membership on our board**, three new members in two years, which indicates a public dissatisfied with a board's performance or lack of. Add to this a new superintendent.
- ♦ **Unfairness of vouchers and growth of vouchers**. Private schools getting a lot of money per student and does not have to meet any/very few requirements. Private schools get to keep money for students even if they send them back to the public school.

What Can you Do as a Board?

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The big question, and the 4 sub-questions comprising the governing task.



The Logic of Governance

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Knowledge and skills of board members →
Governance policies, priorities, decisions and actions → *School culture and management* → *Classroom instruction* → *Student learning outcomes*

Research

- ❖ What does the latest research related to school board governance tell us about how boards can improve academic achievement through governance?
 - ❖ Key works
 - ❖ Accountability alignment
 - ❖ Strategic planning
 - ❖ Group dynamics

The Key Works

- ❖ Key Work of School Boards is a list of focus areas developed by the National School Boards Association. The NSBA recommends boards focus on:
 - ❖ **Vision:** Where does the board want the district to go?
 - ❖ **Accountability:** Do board member take responsibility for their actions and statements?
 - ❖ **Policy:** Policy is how a board sustainably exercises power to serve students. Through policy, school boards establish a set of cohesive guidelines to transform vision into reality.
 - ❖ **Community Leadership:** Through public advocacy and community engagement, school boards share their concerns and actions with the public.
 - ❖ **Board/Superintendent Relations:** Are the board and superintendent governance partners?

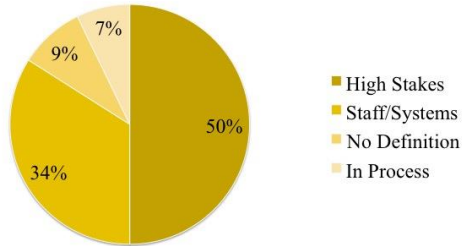
Do They Work?

- ❖ Ford and Ihrke (2015) surveyed board members on their adherence to these concepts and found, for board members serving 5+ years:
 - ❖ “a statistically significant link between adherence to the key work concepts and reading proficiency levels, and district accountability scores.”

Accountability

- ❖ Everybody wants it, but what does accountability mean?
 - ❖ **Legal:** High control, external
 - ❖ **Political:** Low control, external
 - ❖ **Bureaucratic:** High control, internal
 - ❖ **Professional:** Low control, internal

How Do you Define Accountability?



Does It Matter?

- ❖ Not one approach was better...but:
 - ❖ Board members serving together with shared definitions of accountability oversee comparatively higher performing districts
 - ❖ **When the majority of board members share a definition accountability scores are 2.6 points higher.**

Strategic Planning Prioritization

- ❖ Surveyed 248 Michigan board members:
 - ❖ Do school boards that place high priority on strategic planning obtain better outcomes?
 - ❖ Is board member agreement on the importance of strategic planning linked to better outcomes?

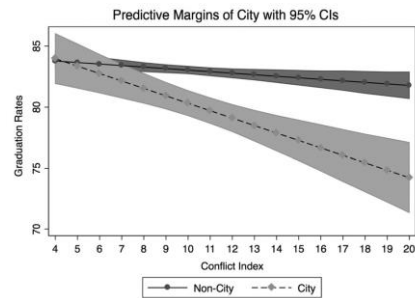
Findings

- ❖ Each single unit increase in prioritization of strategic planning is linked with **a half point increase in reading scores**, and almost **a full point increase in math scores**.
- ❖ When board majorities collectively prioritize strategic planning, math scores increase.

Group Dynamics

- ❖ Surveyed 5,002 board members in the United States. Asked them the extent to which they agree with the following statements:
 - ❖ Conflict among some school board members is high
 - ❖ School board coalitions tend to form along predictable lines
 - ❖ During board negotiations, prior conflicts often resurface
 - ❖ Disagreements between board members often become personalized

Conflict and Graduation Rates



Where Does Conflict Come From?

- ❖ In Wisconsin it is function of:
 - ❖ Superintendent relations
 - ❖ Size and urbanity
 - ❖ Length of tenure
 - ❖ Student socioeconomics

Lessons

- ❖ How can Wisconsin school boards enhance performance through governance?

Lesson 1: Key Works or Other Model

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- ❖ An effective governance model has several features. First, it is **fully transparent**. All stakeholders should have access to organizational structures and processes. Second, it is **understood**. Both those serving within an organization and the clientele of the organization should have a full understanding of how the organization functions. Third, it **fosters efficient communication**. Different committees and sub-committees should be able to communicate with each other quickly through established and understood channels. Fourth, it is **logical and mission-driven**. Organizational governance structures should reflect the mission of the organization, and be logically designed to put decision-making authority in the hands of those most qualified in any specific policy area. Fifth, it is **inclusive of all stakeholders**. Those serving in formal positions should be representative of the organization as a whole.

Lesson 2: Strategic Planning

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- ❖ Understand where you are and where you are going. This should be a priority, and should happen in some capacity every time board personnel changes.

Lesson 3: Accountability

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- ❖ Articulate an **accountability statement** so that the board is on the same page, and can make accountability actionable and transparent.

Lesson 4: Group Dynamics

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- ❖ Ask your members, do I agree:
 - ❖ Conflict among some school board members is high
 - ❖ School board coalitions tend to form along predictable lines
 - ❖ During board negotiations, prior conflicts often resurface
 - ❖ Disagreements between board members often become personalized
- ❖ Be proactive when there is a problem.

Overall Lesson

- ❖ Governance does not directly impact performance, but:
 - ❖ Alignment and transparency regarding org. structure, communication, and key concepts is what makes positive academic change possible.

Thank you!

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