



## **Missouri Visioning Project Sub-Committee Report** **Governance, Leadership, and Accountability Sub-Committee**

### **Sub-committee Co-chairs:**

Stephen Kleinsmith, Nixa

Dave Wright, Blue Springs R-IV

*“Educate and inform the whole mass of the people....They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.”* Thomas Jefferson

### **INTRODUCTION**

A historical and fundamental reason for promoting public education is to insure the necessary foundation for a democracy. As a result, America has become a school-based society. With the rapid changes in our society, we realize the challenges are wide and deep for our students and their families. The education community willingly assumes its share of the responsibility to ensure the well-being of the children of the state of Missouri.

### **GOVERNANCE**

The framework for public school governance rests in the model of a democratic form of government, with its attending laws and processes, and modified to address the needs of local school districts in each state. Federal and state laws and regulations provide the structure for the existence and operation of the public education system in the United States.

Governance of public education is provided at the local level by the board of education, which operates within the framework of laws, policies, standards, and requirements set by federal and state governments. To be most effective, boards must create and oversee a school system that addresses the immediate needs of its students and community, while being mindful of the direction and guidance provided by the federal and state levels of governance; yet continuously improving the opportunities for its students.

When attempts are made at the federal and state level to dictate decisions, however well intended, by those who are not part of the educational process, the implementation of desired changes becomes more difficult and often creates an ineffective system. With any increase in a top-down approach, there is less incentive for local citizens to enter into a better understanding of, and participate in, critical issues which must be addressed to insure the educational foundation for the public school students of today and tomorrow.

While acknowledging the importance of the federal role in public education, the scope of the work from the Governance, Leadership and Accountability Subcommittee is concentrated on the roles of state governance and local governance of public schools.

## **LEADERSHIP**

Educational leadership's singular goal is achievement and growth for all students. The attainment of that goal is critical for the economic well-being of Missouri and its communities. As stated by the Public Education Leadership Project (Harvard, 2011), "a poorly educated citizenry erodes not only the quality of a country's workforce and its competitiveness, but undermines the potential of our democracy." The committee would add that it also undermines the potential of each of our children.

The roles and responsibilities of the Governor and the Missouri General Assembly are critical for providing the leadership and legal structure for public schools systems in the state. The Missouri State Board of Education plays a key role in the development of the supporting structures for the work of leaders in local districts. The expectations set at the state level have tremendous impact on the work of all state level systems, as well as at the local district level. State leadership's decisions impact the ability of local school leaders to meet the educational needs of the students in their communities.

At the local level, the committee distinguishes between **governance leadership**, the task of the board of education, from **administrative leadership**, the task of the superintendent. However, district effectiveness depends on a collaborative leadership team made up of board of education and superintendent, with governance and administrative leaders informed about, focused on, and successful in their respective duties.

Missouri school boards set the focus and direction for their districts by working through its governing documents for whose approval is a specific, legal responsibility of the local board. Then, the task of the superintendent, working with district- and building-level administrators, faculty and staff, is to develop and implement the procedures necessary to execute the board's vision for the district.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Because the governance and administrative members of the district leadership team are accountable to persons at all levels of society and government, ensuring methods of evaluating accountability is critical. All stakeholders to public education share in that accountability as well, through the standards they set and the expectations they hold for the education of children.

Districts which seek to improve their results engage in the close tracking and willing revision of school processes. Such close observation and measurement may require districts to take more complex approaches to program evaluation; may encourage careful data-driven analysis; and demand that student achievement be a principal concern of governance leadership and administrative leadership when giving consideration to district plans, programs, and support.

Effective governance and administrative leadership actions depend on all parties to know and understand their roles; to become effective in the use of their available resources; to preserve focus on student learning as the purpose of all schools for every child; and to accept, promote, and share accountability with engaged and responsible parties at all levels of school and society.

## **SUMMARY**

The obligations for effective governance and administrative leadership are both immediate and long-term. Every child deserves an education that provides the basic skills to provide learning that is sustainable for life. It is critical

that state and local governments assume a strong leadership role in providing excellent school systems with a strong alignment in vision and expectations among all governmental entities.

Systemic reform at the district, community, state and federal levels requires reflection, planning, resource allocation, hard work, measurement, and monitoring. Effective leadership teams must not only guarantee the present effectiveness of schools but must also work to guarantee continuous improvement into the future.

These are the hallmarks of effective Governance, Leadership, and Accountability. Public education is a democratic process. When it succeeds, it succeeds collectively; when it fails, it fails collectively.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The Governance, Leadership and Accountability Committee determined which Guiding Principles were important to its work. Further discussion organized the principles into the four intertwined, yet distinctly important, general areas of Public Education; Governance; Leadership; and Accountability.

### **Public Education**

1. All children are entitled to a comprehensive public education.
2. Public education provides the foundation of a successful community that is educated, informed, and engaged.
3. Federal, state, and community financial support is required for a sustainable public education system.

### **Governance**

4. Effective public education governance requires a strategic vision with measurable outcomes for pre-K-20 education.
5. The primary unit of local school district governance is the Leadership Team, comprised of the Board of Education together with its Superintendent.
6. Student learning depends on a collaborative governance effort, prioritized for student learning outcomes, and executed by local school boards, educators, parents, communities, and local, state, and federal governments.
7. Effective local school governance is founded in a relationship between the School Board and Superintendent that is based on communication and trust.
8. Effective public school governance is based on data-driven decisions that depend on information that is accurate, reliable, relevant, timely and available.

### **Leadership**

9. Effective local school leadership is founded in a collaborative relationship between the School Board and the Superintendent, focused on student achievement, and based on mutual communication and trust.
10. Leaders are lifelong learners.
11. Leaders set high expectations for themselves and others.
12. Effective leaders demonstrate personal integrity and ethical behavior.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

13. All stakeholders in public education are accountable for their actions, and the results of those actions; local school district communities are accountable for their financial support and its results.
14. Accountability for continuous improvement depends on all stakeholders in the community.

15. Accountability for school district success rests heavily on the district Leadership Team and its focus on continuous improvement.
16. Local School Boards are accountable for the use of public resources for the purpose of guaranteeing learning by all public school students; public school success depends on the provision of sufficient supporting resources from multiple stakeholders, including local, state, and county revenue sources.

## KEY ISSUES

1. **The affirmative duty to focus all stakeholders on improving the welfare of children by providing a world class education.** There is a “growing awareness that academic skills and knowledge increase a young person’s chances of leading a productive life.” (Harvard, 2011) That productivity will influence the quality of life for all citizens of Missouri.
2. **Public perception of education is incomplete, at best, and negative, at worst.** The current system of state and federal accountability is based on compliance with federal laws that set arbitrary goals for achievement with a focus on what schools are not accomplishing. Missouri schools are probably stronger than they have ever been, but with limited methods of assessing the specifics of the broad impact education is making.

This growth is occurring in spite of growing challenges for children and their families and in a political arena that often fails to recognize the innovations and positive changes in which schools are involved. The message is counterintuitive to the reality and not constructive in creating good schools. Advocacy by and for all stakeholders is critical.

3. **Public policy that does not take into account the wide variability and complexity among school districts, school buildings, and individual students.** Public school districts, as well as individual schools within the districts, do not fit a particular mold. Any efforts to build an educational system without consideration of the different needs and resources of a community will hinder continuous improvement in schools.

The National School Boards’ Association (NSBA) recognized “fulfilling their potential,” in reference to students, as one of the most important objectives for K-12 education, even more than “preparing for college or workforce.” Do the state and local governance structures support the work of schools in attaining that objective?

4. **Public policy that focuses on a very narrow sphere of learning.** Public education has been viewed as a basic component for democracy as well as being necessary for personal development. It is disturbing that the present trend to over-emphasize math and science leaves major deficiencies in our present system of curriculum and instruction, which sends the message that overlooking other content areas is acceptable. As leaders, we must carefully consider the ramifications of a system so narrowly focused.
5. **Increased challenges of providing effective school governance in a politicized system.** There is increased involvement of politically motivated groups and for-profit businesses in the realm of public education for purposes which are not always conducive to achieving a world-class education for all students. State and local leaders must transcend political roots and communicate openly with their constituents. Individual pandering to partisan concerns undermines the focus, purpose, integrity, and credibility of leaders.

6. **The need to engage all state and community stakeholders in an understanding of the following issues and the impact of each on education:**
- a. Accountability
  - b. Accreditation
  - c. Assessment
  - d. Student readiness
  - e. Contemporary challenges for family life

A greater understanding of these issues by all state leaders and a better method of communicating to the public by all local leaders would do much to resolve roadblocks to building a strong support system for education.

7. **Inconsistent succession planning within state and local governance structures.** Turnover in the General Assembly has had an unintended negative effect on public school governance at the state level. The intricacies of school governance and school leadership are difficult to understand at the level that produces the best legislation when experience and expertise are limited. It is critical that a vision and strategic plan for education be maintained at the state level to provide continuity during any legislative turnover.

The alignment of visioning and strategic planning in the community with the state level commitment is important at the local level. Districts must also ensure that continuity and growth are not disrupted, when new board members or superintendent join the leadership team, so there are no negative effects on student achievement. Planning for succession prepares the way for consistent leadership over time in school systems at the board governance and administrative levels of leadership, as well at the building level.

8. **Concerns for the development and preparation of strong, effective leaders.** This concern extends to the political leaders of Missouri, to the governance leaders on local boards of education, and to district- and building-wide leaders in the schools. Well-informed, thoughtful, risk taking leaders are critical to continuous improvement in education.

Service on the local board of education is one of the few means by which the average American can have direct influence on a public institution. However, because of the nature of the institution, the involvement with professional education associations, and the fiduciary responsibilities, candidates should possess a level of competence, appropriate motivation, and commitment prior to being elected. Once elected, education and training in the areas of governance and leadership are needed to enhance skills.

9. **Success needs to be measured differently .** At the present time, Missouri has limited systems for measuring accountability for stakeholders. There is an absence of predictive measures and even of “doable” goals to help set expectations for performance. The identification of available measures, as well as others needed to evaluate performance within districts, are necessary to build a robust accountability system. In federal legislation, the goals for student achievement are laudatory and needed; however, the process becomes counterproductive when the evaluation measures are limited.

Too often, schools are held accountable for results beyond their control. Without reaching school readiness, learning will not be optimal for students in classrooms. There are many contemporary

challenges for individual families of children and inconsistent, inequitable access to resources to meet those challenges. The issues of declining parental involvement in general and, as children age in particular, also have immeasurable effects on the results reached by local districts. The pressure on local districts is often intense in many communities to meet basic school readiness needs of children; yet there is no broad accountability system able to take the effect of readiness factors into consideration.

10. **Accountability should be shared among stakeholders from the local to the state level.** Due to the lack of accountability systems and measures, all stakeholders are currently judged by the weakest link. This leads to the often negative perception of our work by the general public.

By aligning the vision for a world class education throughout Missouri from the Governor's office, the General Assembly, the State Board of Education, and local boards of education with a encompassing strategic plan, each level of governance will be able to demonstrate and to monitor a level of accountability needed for success.

## **PROMISING PRACTICES**

### **Legislative Advocacy**

The Certified Board Member training of the Missouri School Boards' Association recommends that each local board of education annually appoint a Delegate to MSBA, who will provide a report on educational issues pending on the state and federal levels to the local board in the monthly agenda. The board will then work with the district Delegate, MSBA, the National School Boards Association (NSBA), and other concerned groups and organizations on matters of mutual interest.

Each year, the board will develop a short- and long-range legislative plan, which will contain the following elements, as a minimum:

- A method for maintaining regular contact with state and federal legislators and/or legislative staff to receive updates on education issues in the legislature and to inform them of the potential effect(s) of pending legislation on the district
- A method for networking with other groups, such as PTA, Chamber of Commerce, community action groups or service clubs to discuss education and legislative issues
- A method for having board members meet with state legislators at least twice a year, either in the district or in Jefferson City

The district Delegate shall serve as the board's liaison to MSBA, shall participate in MSBA events as approved by the local board, and shall advise MSBA of the local board's views regarding legislative positions and activities.

### **Community Advocacy**

Public perception of education can be either preventative or reactionary. How that is handled really determines how people will view the educational system in a school community. By taking the preventative approach, school districts will have made communicating information a top strategy and have developed a communication plan. The district recommends that a plan should include how the district sends out information, which methods of communication are preferred by the community, and how community members may submit information into district processes.

What to communicate should be established to help with perception in the community. Too many times schools neglect to promote what they do well or fail to acknowledge what is not going well. If people feel like they know what is going on in the district, the more they feel a part of the system.

An understanding of what accountability, accreditation, assessment, school readiness, and other contemporary challenges are and how they impact the local district will build cohesiveness in the community. The world of education today is not the same educational systems that parents experienced. Furthering their understanding will enhance communication and build support for a world class education within the community.

### **The Missouri Quality Award**

The Missouri Quality Award, which is modeled after the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, recognizes excellence in quality leadership. Participating districts have learned and applied quality implementation techniques and assessment methods to ensure the quality of their district programs.

### **Iowa Association of School Boards' Lighthouse Study: School Boards and Student Achievement**

This study indicates that school boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than school boards in low-achieving districts. In addition, this difference appears to carry through among administrators and teachers throughout the districts. IASB's goal was to identify links between what school boards do and the achievement of students in schools. An IASB research team studied school board/superintendent leadership teams in districts where schools have generated unusually high achievement over a period of several years and compared those teams to ones in districts where schools have consistently generated unusually low levels of achievement.

The key findings revealed the following similarities in high achieving schools: (1) caring about children; (2) peaceable relationships; (3) satisfaction in board opinion of superintendent; (4) tension about roles in a site-based system; (5) students in categorical programs (special education, Title I, bilingual programs); and (6) local backgrounds of board members and staff.

The key differences between high- and low-achieving districts were found in (1) elevating vs. accepting belief systems; (2) understanding and focus on school renewal; and (3) actions in buildings and classrooms. From the study, seven conditions for productive change were identified. The comparison of the boards in the "moving" and "stuck" districts revealed consistency within and across districts. Overall, the vast majority of people in the high-achieving (moving) districts identified the following conditions present in board governance work:

1. Emphasis on building a human organizational system
2. Ability to create and sustain initiatives
3. Supportive workplace for staff
4. Staff development
5. Support for school sites through data and information
6. Community involvement
7. Integrated leadership

### **High Reliability Organizations (HROs)**

Leaders who understand the importance of the education task are well served by looking for examples of effective governance and leadership as they are demonstrated in other sectors where failure is unacceptable. When found elsewhere in our society and economy, these companies, agencies, and programs are called High Reliability

Organizations (HROs). Research identifies five characteristics of HROs (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001) as responsible for the “mindfulness” that keeps them working well when facing unexpected situations:

- Preoccupation with the potential for failure
- Reluctance to simplify interpretations
- Sensitivity to operations
- Commitment to resilience
- Deference to expertise

Effective Governance and Leadership action depends on all parties to know and understand their roles; to become expert in the use of their assigned resources; to preserve focus on student learning as the purpose of all schools; and to accept, promote, and share accountability with all engaged and responsible parties, at all levels of school and society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of local school boards, superintendents, school administrators, and teachers have a looming task ahead. Managing directives, mandates, and expectations with increasing budget deficits will be extremely difficult without the addition of strong community support and strongly established priorities. The school districts and their respective communities must work together to address the needs of their students through strategic planning, implementation of strategies to meet the goals and objectives, and evaluation for continuous improvement.

- 1. Advocate for a vision and strategic plan that provide a world class education for Missouri students**  
School board members, superintendents, and community members must collaborate and communicate with state and federal leadership to better serve the children and families of their communities. During the community forums, almost every student expressed the sentiment, “I am not a statistic,” and requested that the focus be on (quality) teaching and learning, not on performance and budget.
- 2. Advocate for a vision and strategic plan that provide a world class education for Missouri students**  
School board members, superintendents, and community members must collaborate and communicate with state and federal leadership to better serve the children and families of their communities. During the community forums, almost every student expressed the sentiment, “I am not a statistic,” and requested that the focus be on (quality) teaching and learning, not on performance and budget.
- 3. Align the vision, strategic plan, processes, funding, and accountability system needed for a world class education within the Governor’s office, the General Assembly, the Missouri State Board of Education, and local boards of education.** Missouri must become more efficient and effective in our processes if we are to optimize student achievement. The lack of coordinated support among and within all levels of state and local governance often creates intense responsibilities for the local school districts, trying to meet the needs of children and their families and be in compliance with all state regulations and requirements.
- 4. Eliminate barriers for student learning based on calendar, seat time, and fixed physical boundaries**  
The National Association of State Boards of Education (2011) made recommendations that state leadership should take an active role in devising standards, policies, and procedures to eliminate all



existing barriers for student learning within current public policy. As technologies are developed, the educational structures need to become more fluid to accommodate educational innovations.

Local boards of education should create an environment that actively promotes and supports innovation within and beyond the school walls. This would include the use of technology to facilitate student learning that transcends the traditional building and school day. The development of incentives for districts to further the use of time by the state legislature would alleviate any fiscal constraints associated with extending school day and/or year.

**5. Center state and local education policy around best practice, not partisan ideology**

Missouri will develop and communicate a vision for education that transcends political leanings and aspirations and the lack of continuity associated with turnover in the General Assembly. Advocacy efforts to inform legislators of the needs of the children, of the local efforts being made to meet those needs, and the obstacles in delivering quality learning and teaching are critical. Non-partisan behavior must exist in decision-making about public education at all levels of governance and leadership, if Missouri is to provide a world-class education for all students. Public education is constantly in change; purposeful continuous growth and improvement must accommodate and transcend those changes.

**6. Empower boards and superintendents to function as a unified district leadership team.** School systems need strong leadership teams to transform teaching and learning. Team building skills and communication skills avert common pitfalls in providing leadership for the district. Transparency in operations does much to build collegial relationships with the community and within the district.

Communication and trust are strong tools in engaging the district and its community in meeting the needs of students and their families. Working within the district, a more actively engaged faculty and staff will assist district leadership in effective planning and implementation of strategies. Working with the community will more accurately inform district leadership as to adequacy and effectiveness of practice. Working with other agencies is important to improve access to health, social, and educational services.

**7. Develop a robust data system that collects information to drive and inform instructional practice, administrative leadership, and governance decisions.** High-stakes testing with the reliance on limited measures of achievement have had inconsistent and often detrimental effects on curriculum, instructional practice, decision-making, and allocation of resources within school districts. The current accountability system is not effective in that results are not immediate, which diminishes its value in goal setting, review of practice, and decision-making.

Accountability system should be based on standards and excellence, not competition and comparison, as one size does not fit all. Arbitrary benchmarks are ineffective in strategic planning that must account for the needs of all students. Acknowledgement that schools of poverty cannot be compared to schools in affluent districts, which are rarely affected by state budget deficits, unfunded federal mandates, or other inequities of funding, should be factored into any accountability system.

**8. Improve the processes of obtaining evaluative input from constituents and stakeholders by the use of multiple emerging tools, including the internet, social media, and survey tools to promote engaged interaction.** As technologies emerge, new tools for collaborative interaction and

communication will be developed for the use of all stakeholders. Thoughtful planning for the use of any such tools with differing preferences by segments of the population will further enhance an understanding of the vision for a world class education in Missouri and any state and local plans developed to realize that vision.

## RESOURCES

A Vision for Public Education: Equity and Excellence by Georgia School Boards Association and Georgia School Superintendents Association

<http://www.visionforpubliced.org>

Education Reform Plan Summary

<http://www.dese.gov>

Initial Community Forum Summaries prepared by Cynthia Beckmann, Tom McVeigh, and Alexis Petri of the UMKC Institute for Human Development. February 2011.

[www.ihd.umkc.edu](http://www.ihd.umkc.edu)

Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) "Lighthouse Study: School Boards and Student Achievement"

<http://www.iasb.org/>

Key Works of School Boards, National School Boards Association

<http://www.nsba.org>

Missouri School Improvement Program 5 (MSIP5)

<http://www.dese.gov>

National School Boards Association's National Survey

<http://www.nsba.org>

New Patterns of School Governance

<http://eric.uoregon.edu/publications/digests/digest141.html>

No Time to Wait: Creating Contemporary School Structures for Students Today and Tomorrow

<http://nasbe.org/>

Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University

<http://www.hbs.edu/pelp/>

Schlechty, Phillip C. *No Community Left Behind*, Phi Delta Kappan, April, 2008

States Take the Lead on Accountability

<http://www.ccsso.org>

The Transformation of U.S. Education: From a Low to a High(er) Reliability System

Presentation by Tim Waters, Ed.D., to Missouri Vision Taskforce, August 30, 2010

<http://mcrel.org>

“Video Uses Student Voices to Explore New Directions in Education,” The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 26, 2011. <http://www.chronicle.com/>

## VISIONING PROJECT MEMBERSHIP

### Steering Committee

Dr. Tom Cummings	North Kansas City	Project Coordinator
Dr. Carter D. Ward	MSBA	Executive Director
Mr. Roger Kurtz	MASA	Executive Director/Facilitator
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**Governance, Leadership, and Accountability**

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Kris Callen	Springfield	Board Member
Jim Clark	Ferguson-Florissant R-II	Past Board Member
Judith DeLany	Carrollton R-VII	Superintendent
Mary Esselman	Kansas City 33	Administrator
Chuck Fugate	Ozark R-VI	Board Member
Linda Gray Smith	Past Superintendent	Past Superintendent
Kathy Grover	Clever R-V	Administrator
Shelley Jokerst	Ste. Genevieve R-II	Administrator
Robin Krause	Knob Noster R-VIII	Board Member
Charlotte Miller	Southern Boone Co R-I	Superintendent
Mike Pratte	Gasconade Co. R-I	Board Member
Mi'Andrea Prince	Kansas City	Administrator
Norm Ridder	Springfield	Superintendent
Brad Sprague	Clark Co. R-I	Board Member
Johnny Thompson	Crawford Co R-II	Superintendent