

# From the Board Room

A newsletter for members of the Vermont School Boards Association, 2 Prospect Street, Suite #4, Montpelier VT 05602  
Phone: 1-800-244-VSBA or 802-223-3580 Fax: 802-223-0098

ISSUE #2007-03

April 2007

## INSIDE

THE SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER'S	
LEGACY .....	PG. 2
CHALKBOARD 2017 .....	PG. 3
LEGAL CLIPS .....	PG. 4
BURLINGTON SHOWCASES "FARM TO SCHOOL" PROGRAM .....	PG. 6
VSBIT CORNER .....	PG. 6
FRESH AIR FOR SCHOOL BUILDINGS .....	PG. 7
ARE PUBLIC SCHOOLS READY TO PAY FOR PERFORMANCE? .....	PG. 8
LINK BETWEEN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND STUDENT SUCCESS .....	PG. 9
STUDENT INTERNS CONNECT TO REAL JOBS .....	PG. 10
07-08 SCHOOL BOARD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT .....	PG. 11

*Editor:* John A. Nelson  
email: jnelson@vtvsba.org  
*Production Manager:* Kerri Lamb  
email: klamb@vtvsba.org

*Articles printed represent diverse points of view and may be controversial in nature. It is the belief of the Association that the democratic process functions best through discussions which challenge and stimulate thinking on the part of the reader. Therefore, materials published present the ideas/beliefs of those who write them and are not necessarily the views or policies of the VSBA unless so stated. This newsletter is distributed at no charge to all members of the Association. Contact the Association by calling 802-223-3580.*

## Navigating Board Politics

by Deryl W. Wynn

Five veteran school board attorneys recently participated in a live audio-conference sponsored by NSBA's Council of School Attorneys. The session, titled "Navigating Board Politics: The School Attorney as Counselor at Law," provided the backdrop for an insightful discussion about various issues routinely presented to school boards and their attorneys.

The panelists' comments, which were peppered with narrative responses and shared experiences, are summarized here.

### The duty of care:

Each board member must exercise the degree of diligence, care, and skill that an ordinary, prudent individual would use under similar circumstances. This obligation, known as "duty of care," applies to the board as a whole and to the individual members.

To satisfy this obligation, a board member must, at a minimum:

- attend and participate in board meetings and, if appropriate, committee meetings;
- establish a general understanding of the district's organizational structure and chain of authority;
- review board minutes and other written documents provided in connection with board business;
- understand the board's fiduciary responsibilities;
- participate in board retreats and strategic planning; and

- use good judgment when making decisions for the district.

### Disputes about governance:

Under the best of circumstances, school board leaders and the superintendent are in total agreement about their respective roles and responsibilities. However, in those instances in which there is no agreement, if board members lack practical ways of negotiating with one another and the board's position on the authority of the superintendent is unclear, disaster is just around the corner, perhaps closer.

Without agreement on what constitutes micromanagement versus effective board governance, flared tempers often lead to misunderstanding.

All too often, the failure to anticipate possible disagreements leads to conditions where even the best among us, in the heat of the debate, succumb to "turf war" behavior rather than trying to resolve issues in a logical fashion.

During a conflict, the business of the district is set aside, increasing the risk of the board breaching its duty of care. To guard against such an outcome, school board members should periodically discuss their preferred model of governance with the superintendent.

The following questions, if addressed early on, will inform the board and superintendent of the proper conduct for administrative issues:

(POLITICS Continued on page 3...)

# The School Board Member's Legacy

Typically, board members do not think of their service with respect to what they will leave for others when their terms are completed. Yet, board members do leave a legacy, an inheritance, good or bad, which is bestowed on those who succeed them. These individual leadership legacies (Galford & Maruca, 2006) are interwoven into the fabric of school governance and blended into the character of the board. That board character changes over time, responding to current events and pressures, and to an assortment of demands that leave marks on the governance structure of public education.

The challenges facing public education today, in many ways, threaten the perceived and, perhaps, preferred legacies of boards. Increasing legislation, decreasing funding, and mounting demands for fewer resources continually defy the system, making school board service more time consuming and more complicated. However, in the face of ever-growing concerns surrounding academic proficiencies and financial hardships, school board members must acknowledge the challenges and actively engage in service with the end-in-mind. They must be prepared to tackle the tough problems facing public education with a determined resolve to leave their successors poised to continue the course of school governance efficiently and effectively. Still, the question remains: how can board members guarantee the legacy they will eventually pass to those who follow them?

## Consistency in Governance

"Board members must wade through a sea of legislated responsibilities, from levying taxes and hiring the superintendent to selecting materials for sex education courses and ensuring that students dress appropriately" (Hill, 2004, p. 78). Hill continues by stating that state codes establish board responsibilities in these areas: school buildings and grounds; professional and support staff; funding; curriculum; transportation; attendance; dispute resolution; federal and state categorical program implementation; com-

pliance, management, and implementation of federal civil rights laws and court orders; and vendor contracts. However, the assignment of responsibilities has not only been from above, assigned duties have also risen from below in the form of unions and parent groups.

One of the first realities for new board members as leaders is to become aware that they are not aware (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). This period of personal transformation is critical, as new members begin learning the unknown. Equally important is the realization that the process of governance cannot wait until all board members are comfortable and knowledgeable in their roles. The truth is that all of this responsibility can be overwhelming, even to experienced board members. However, keep in mind that the governance responsibility is assigned to the board in its entirety, not individually. Consequently, veteran board members offer the newly organized board the benefit and wisdom of their experience and enable boards to move forward, while new members are learning their roles.

Additionally, school corporation policy provides consistency in governance, authorizing implementation, compliance, and management of activities through the formal adoption of rules, processes, and procedures to govern local school corporations. These policies belong to the board and represent an integral part of the legacy boards inherit and bequeath. That is why it is so important that policy be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to reflect, not only the requirements levied by federal and state authority, but also the culture and climate of the community:

## Board Credibility

Board leadership is all about credibility, or the trustworthiness of the board to act responsibly in every facet of its

governance role. Constituencies, both community and school, invest their trust in the collective decision-making capability of the governing board to represent their best interests in public education. In turn, the board continually earns and/or builds on that invested trust at every meeting, by every decision it makes, including the process of decision-making it employs.

Credibility is the heart of leadership, but it is also a relationship. More specifically, it is a reciprocal relationship between those who lead and those who choose to follow (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Following the board's leadership is an intentional choice of its constituencies, not an autonomic response to position. A board's worthiness is measured by its credibility, established through trust earned by past and present performance.

## Leadership Integrity

A board's leadership integrity is more than its collective character, ethics, and morals. It is about the ability of the board to operate effectively as a whole (Cloud, 2006). A board's collective action defines its value and leadership integrity. It is what ultimately matters. However, it rarely occurs without a conscious effort stemming from a cooperative determination among board members to serve the needs of followers before their own (Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

"We'll all be remembered for something. The question is, for what?" (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, p. 18) The question is valid. How will your term of service be remembered? What contribution will remain when you have retired from board service? It is not too early to anticipate the legacy that is yours to leave, the one you will forge, both individually and collectively, during your years of board service. It is worth thinking about. 🚌

*Excerpted from the  
Indiana School Boards Association's  
Winter 2007*

(POLITICS... continued from page 1)

- How should a board member respond to a school employee's report of another employee's misconduct?
- Are there any circumstances under which a board member should not inform the superintendent of a report of school employee misconduct?
- Must a board member always share with the full board a parent's concerns?
- When is it proper for a board member to launch his or her own investigation into suspected fiscal mismanagement, employee misconduct, or school facility concerns?

Ideally, the goal is to resolve these types of matters well in advance of any problems.

#### Codes of conduct

Some boards have created a board member code of conduct to address how the board should engage the superintendent and how board members should engage one another. The code of conduct is often included in new board member orientation and reviewed annually. This process helps crystallize board members' understanding of how their behavior affects the operation

of the school district-and often leads to a reduction in internal disputes.

The legal duties of board members are generally defined within a state statute or constitution. Few, if any, legal authorities require board members to be civil to one another. However, a number of boards address such issues through the terms of a "school board member code of conduct." These documents set forth general rules of civility and expectations of deportment and demeanor when conducting school business.

#### The board's role

For most districts, the board's role is to set policy and exercise the oversight necessary to ensure that its policies are implemented and its goals accomplished. In contrast, the job of the superintendent and other school officials is to manage the daily affairs of the district in a manner most likely to accomplish the objectives of the board.


An appreciation for the complexities of governance models and a clear understanding of the duties of board members and administrators is greatly enhanced through board training.

State associations and NSBA have excellent resources for such training.

NSBA has recently issued a revised edition of **Becoming a Better Board Member** and also offers a governance training series called the **Key Work of School Boards**. Both are available from NSBA's website, [www.nsba.org](http://www.nsba.org).

A school board that understands its roles and responsibilities-along with a similarly well-informed superintendent and school attorney will be well-equipped to navigate school board politics, practice good governance, and avoid unnecessary conflicts.

A school board's overall concern must be with maintaining an ethical and practical response that will help the district achieve its mission. This requires planning, training, and the willingness to candidly approach the delineation of roles and responsibilities.

School boards able to stay above the fray and engage in best practices will be able to stay focused on what really matters-setting policies aimed at raising student achievement. 

*Reprinted with permission from School Board News, March 2007. Copyright 2007. National School Boards Association. All rights reserved. Deryl W Wynn, of the McAnany, Van Cleave & Phillips law firm in Kansas City, Kan., is chair of NSBA's Council of School Attorneys.*

## Chalkboard 2017

### Conversations About Using Technology to Support 21st Century Students Speakers

Tuesday  
July 10  
6:00pm-9:00pm  
Sheraton~Burlington  
Cost: \$75  
(includes dinner)


To register call  
Peter Drescher  
at 828-1381

As technology becomes smaller, faster, cheaper and ubiquitous, the career we call "teaching" is going to evolve into something different. Wireless tablets and the iPhone provide just the first hints of hardware that will change our daily lives over the next ten years. How can you tell the difference between what's trendy and what's educationally useful? What can you do today to prepare yourself better for 2017?

**Dr. Bernie Dodge**, Professor of Education San Diego State University  
Noted for his development of WebQuests, The courses he teaches are about the design of learning systems, on WebQuests and lessons wrapped around telecollaboration, databases and

software, and the design of educational games and simulations.

**Dave Warlick**, Consultant and Creator of Landmarks for Schools ~ Author and designer of "The Citation Machine," David Warlick is a 30 year educator, with the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction.

**Jim Moulton**, Consultant ~ is a parent and educator first-purposefully focused on preparing the learners of today to be the leaders of tomorrow. Jim collaborates with others in his home state of Maine in designing, developing and delivering professional development in support of the Maine Learning Technology Initiative. 

## **NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND**

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has released final regulations to guide the creation of tests for students in special education who are capable of learning grade-level content, but not as quickly as their peers. Currently, the only options available for such students under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) are to take the general assessments that are given to all students, which may be too difficult, or tests intended for students with significant cognitive impairments, which are too easy. According to ED Deputy Secretary Raymond J. Simon, the new tests will allow a more accurate assessment of what these students know and how best to teach them. The tests may also allow some schools to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB when they had not before. Up to 2% of students' proficient and advanced scores on these particular tests, which ED calls "alternate assessments based on modified achievement standards," may be counted when measuring AYP. Two percent of all students is equivalent to about 20% of students with disabilities. ED also allows up to 1% of all students in a state, which is equivalent to 10% of students with disabilities, to take a different type of alternate assessment and be counted as proficient for purposes of AYP. Those tests, the ones used with students with significant cognitive impairments, are less complex and comprehensive. This testing flexibility was first announced in April 2005, with draft regulations released in December 2005. In the meantime, states were allowed to use a mathematical model to adjust their scores as if the policy were already in place, an approach that will be allowed for the 2006-07 school year not after that unless the state enters into a partnership with the ED to develop the "2 percent" tests. "Only those who participate with us in a meaningful way" can use the mathematical model, says Mr. Simon.

## **NCLBA**

A record number of Illinois schools has escaped No Child Left Behind (NCLB) sanctions this school year largely because of changes in how schools are judged and alterations that made state achievement exams easier for students to pass. Nearly 82% of the state's public schools met federal goals on the state's math and reading assessments, compared to 74% the year before. But 450 of 3,100 schools that met the goals did so because state officials changed the way students' scores were counted, not because students necessarily did better on the tests. Illinois built in a cushion that allows subgroups of students to pass state assessments with lower scores than initially required under the law. When NCLB was enacted in 2002, many educators and lawmakers predicted that the number of failing schools would soar as the bar for passing ratcheted up and number of students required to take tests increased. But states have made so many adjustments to their testing systems, the numbers have not risen as quickly as expected. In Illinois, the number has declined every year since the law was instituted. "There is clearly a race to the bottom going on," says Kevin Carey, a policy director at Education Sector, which has studied state testing changes.

About 87% of Illinois elementary schools and 72% of charter schools met federal goals. Of the nearly 700 schools in Illinois that failed to meet the federal targets, about half failed only because of the performance of special education students. Nationwide, educators have debated whether NCLB demands too much of special education students. Some argue it's unrealistic to expect them to pass tests at the same rate as other students; others contend schools need to do more to help special education students surpass the bar. Laura Kaloi, a policy director for the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD),

says NCLB has forced schools to focus attention on special education students. As a result, she says, those students are making gains on state and national exams. "This is the first time that we have data on how special education students are doing compared to their peers and it is making a lot of people nervous, but that's a good thing," Ms. Kaloi says. "We strongly advocate that these kids not be pushed out of the accountability system based on the hue and cry."

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION & DISABILITIES**

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit has ruled that a student was a "child with a disability" entitled to special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), even though she excelled academically, because any negative impact her Asperger's Syndrome had on her educational performance could qualify as an "adverse effect" for purposes of IDEA's eligibility test. However, the court ruled that her parents were not entitled to reimbursement for the cost of private school tuition or to compensatory education services. L.I., a student at Cornish Elementary School (CES) in Cornish, Maine, excelled academically but began having psychological problems that culminated during sixth grade in a suicide attempt and a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome and adjustment disorder with depressed mood. To qualify as a "child with a disability" under IDEA, a child must: (1) have at least one of several enumerated conditions, each of which is further defined in federal regulations as "adversely affecting a child's educational performance" so as to constitute a disability; and (2) by reason of the condition, need special education and related services. A district-convened pupil evaluation team (PET), which IDEA refers to as an

*(CLIPS continued on page 5...)*



*(CLIPS continued on page 5...)*

Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, identified L.I. as a “qualified individual with a disability” under the federal Rehabilitation Act but concluded she was ineligible for services under IDEA because her condition had “no significant adverse effect on education.” The parents, who in the interim had placed L.I. in private school, unsuccessfully disputed the IDEA eligibility determination in a due process hearing. They then appealed the hearing officer’s decision to U.S. district court, which ruled in their favor, concluding that L.I.’s condition adversely affected her educational performance in the areas of socialization and communication. Noting that neither Maine nor federal regulations qualify the term “adversely affects,” the district court ruled that “any negative effect should be sufficient” to constitute a disability under IDEA.

The First Circuit affirmed. The appeals court declined to adopt MAD 55’s reasoning that a disability meets the “adversely affects” criterion “only if the student’s condition imposes a significant negative impact on the child’s educational performance ... limited to those areas of performance actually being measured and assessed” by the school district in accordance with law. Maine’s definition of “educational performance” lists performance on assessments as just one of many indicators, both academic and non-academic, and “Maine’s broad definition of ‘educational performance’ squares with the broad purpose behind IDEA,” the court concluded. The “adversely affects” component could include any adverse affect, no matter how slight, without opening the floodgate to IDEA claims as the school district feared, because even if a student has one of the enumerated disabilities under the first prong of the eligibility test, it does not necessarily

follow that the student also fulfills the second prong.

The First Circuit next determined that the lower court had not committed clear error in applying this legal standard. Under the first prong, the lower court had not erred by relying solely on state content area performance indicators to assess L.I.’s “educational performance” but, rather, had found that Asperger’s impaired L.I.’s “communication,” an area incorporated in Maine’s definition of “educational performance,” and that L.I.’s “adverse effect” also rested on other difficulties implicating “the career preparation component of the Maine general curriculum.” Under the second prong, the district court had correctly defined “special education,” the services agreed to by the PET as part of its Rehabilitation Act plan were “special education” services within the meaning of IDEA, and “the district has not adequately explained to us why [L.I.] does not need special education.” The district court had properly denied reimbursement for L.I.’s private school tuition, as a private placement is not “reasonably calculated to enable the student to receive an educational benefit” under IDEA where the private school offers none of the special education services recommended by the experts or the PET. The district court’s denial of compensatory services also was proper because the IEP the court had ordered MAD 55 formulate for L.I. necessarily would resolve this question.

### **FACILITIES, PROPERTY & SCHOOL BUSINESS**

A parent group in North Carolina has filed a class action lawsuit in state court seeking to bar Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) from converting 22 schools to a year-round schedule this summer. Wake CARES alleges that requiring only some students to attend year -round schools violates the state constitution’s guarantee of a “uniform system” of schools with “equal oppor-

tunities” provided for all students because those students will have less access to extracurricular and co-curricular activities such as summer camps than students at traditional -calendar schools. School leaders say if Wake CARES gets the requested injunction, it would be hard to come up with a way on such short notice to house the 8,000 new students expected this fall. Under state law, parents must be notified by May 15 where their children will attend classes for the coming year. “It would cause a mad scramble,” says school board member Lori Millberg. “I can’t see a judge giving the injunction.” The year-round calendar can handle more students than traditional schools by putting the buildings in constant use with four staggered schedules. WCPSS officials believe this will help them handle growth by accommodating more than 3,500 additional students. But many parents object to the possibility of having children on different schedules and the loss of longer summer vacations. They argue WCPSS could handle the growth by having schools revert to the maximum enrollments they have had. Jack Boger, dean of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Law and an expert on civil rights education law, says Wake CARES has a “novel argument” but doesn’t have much precedent for arguing that equal opportunity extends toward calendars. Wake CARES failed to persuade voters in November to reject a \$970 million school construction bond referendum that funded the conversions, but the group successfully lobbied county commissioners not to turn over the money approved in the bonds on the ground that the school district was failing to provide enough alternatives to families who could not make the year-round calendar work for them. The school board voted last month to proceed with the conversions by paying for them out of its own funds. The parents then lobbied the county commissioners to sue the school district, but the commissioners chose not to go to court. 🚌

# Burlington School District Showcases "Farm to School" Program in San Francisco

By: Winton Goodrich, VSBA Associate Director



"Farm Fresh:" Not words often associated with school meals programs. But in Vermont, the "Farm to School" project is working to change not just what students eat, but their understanding of food in general – how it's grown, processed, delivered, and prepared.



Vermont children distribute snacks at the NSBA annual conference.

A team of school leaders from the Burlington School District recently presented their innovative school meals project at the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Convention to school board members and superintendents from around the country. Jeanne Collins, superintendent, Fred Lane, board member, and Doug Davis, food service director, also accompanied by Doug Davis' children, showcased this very successful community collaboration to school leaders in San Francisco.



Fred Lane, Jeanne Collins and Doug Davis of the Burlington School District presented at the National School Boards Association annual conference

The NSBA Showcase highlights exemplary school programs from throughout the United States each year at the annual convention. The Burlington School District is the first Vermont ap-

plicant to be selected for this prestigious recognition.

The Burlington "Farm to School" project was also recently featured in the Time for Kids magazine.

Congratulations from the Vermont School Boards Association! 🚌

## SCHOOL MANAGEMENT RESOURCE CENTER

by Joe Zimmerman, VSBIT Executive Director

On April 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> VSBIT presented its 10th Annual Spring Conference. The conference, which covered issues concerning both Human Resource and Physical Plant Management, was held at the Stoweflake Resort and Conference Center. Those who attended the conference obtained useful information. Some examples follow:

### WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH PEOPLE

This workshop was designed to help participants build stronger teams, increase productivity and reduce stress by learning to communicate effectively with others

### HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAM UPDATE

Attendees learned first hand about VSBIT's new Health promotion and wellness program.

### WHAT IS RISK MANAGEMENT

Participants learned what risk management is truly all about, what it does, what the primary outcomes of a risk management program are and the organizational benefits.

### HOW CAN A RISK MANAGEMENT PROGRAM BENEFIT SCHOOLS

A panel of school business managers and the President of the Public Risk Management Association discussed school related issues.

### HUMAN RESOURCE JEOPARDY

Attendees participated in a HR related game, fashioned after the popular television show

### SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

The Kentucky School Boards Association's Director of Risk Management and its Loss Prevention Manager presented a historical look at safety and security issues in its school system and an overview of strategies used to address them. 🚌

# Fresh Air for School Buildings

By Norm Etkind, BEP, CEM

Director, School Energy Management Program Vermont Superintendents Association

"It feels stuffy in here!" We've all heard people say that. We're in a room full of people and it feels oppressively tight and uncomfortable. We may get drowsy, we may get a headache.

That's the feeling you get when there is inadequate ventilation.

What is occurring is that the carbon dioxide level in the room is becoming elevated. We react physiologically to these levels. At the same time, air borne pathogens originating from the room's occupants and other contaminants are also at higher concentrations. This puts people at greater risk of getting colds, influenza, asthma and other illnesses.

That is why we need to ventilate the building adequately. However, ventilation can cost a lot of money. There is electricity needed to run the fans and fuel required to heat the fresh air being brought into the building in the winter. The trick is to ventilate correctly and efficiently to provide the needed ventilation at the lowest cost possible.

Almost all schools have ventilation systems that were originally designed to provide adequate fresh air for students and staff. From what I have seen in the 119 schools I have visited, most Vermont schools have not optimized the functioning of their ventilation systems. The two main problems are either inadequate ventilation or adequate ventilation that is costing more than it needs to.

Carbon dioxide - CO<sub>2</sub> (not to be confused with the poisonous carbon monoxide) is what we all commonly breathe in and exhale. It is used as a key indicator of occupancy and adequate ventilation. Buildings are designed to meet the requirement that CO<sub>2</sub> levels be below 1000 parts per million (ppm). The design level is generally 800 ppm which equates to an

outside air ventilation rate of 15 cubic feet per minute (cfm) per person for classrooms, auditoriums and libraries. Some areas require 20 cfm. This is a significant amount of ventilation air.

The Vermont Superintendents Association's School Energy Management Program (VSA-SEMP) has acquired a CO<sub>2</sub> meter so I can test schools to see if their systems are operating correctly. I have seen levels as high as almost 3000 ppm. According to a Department of Health publication, the 1000 to 2000 ppm CO<sub>2</sub> range is the level, "associated with complaints of drowsiness and poor air." The 2000 to 5000 ppm range is the "level associated with headaches, sleepiness, and stale, stuffy air. Poor concentration, loss of attention, increased heart rate and slight nausea may also be present."

These higher levels typically happen because the ventilation systems have been inadvertently shut down.

There are several strategies to provide the necessary ventilation while keeping costs down. Some can be done simply by just properly operating controls, while others require a capital investment (or attention to detail when building new systems).

The most important control strategy is: "don't ventilate when you don't need to". Most schools have a mechanism to shut down the air handlers and go to an

unoccupied mode when students are gone. These systems need frequent attention by building staff to ensure they are functioning correctly. This is the first place to go to make sure your systems give you the heat and ventilation you need, not more, not less. A building operating plan that delineates the optimal management of the ventilation system is a great help in achieving this goal.

Ventilation systems should be kept clean and filters changed regularly to help insure good clean air flow.

Some large areas, like gymnasiums and auditoriums can have CO<sub>2</sub> sensors installed that regulate the functioning of the system based on CO<sub>2</sub> demand (directly related to occupancy). These "demand controlled ventilation" systems are designed to provide adequate ventilation at full occupancy. However, most of the time these large areas are not occupied. When coupled with a variable frequency motor to slow down the fan when necessary, it will also reduce electricity use and noise levels.

When retrofitting areas and upgrading ventilation systems the use of energy recovery ventilation will save a significant amount of energy and money. These devices use the exhaust air to pre-heat the incoming air, reducing the load on your heating system.

The key to proper operation of ventilation systems is using your controls properly.



*If you have issues with your school regarding energy use and ventilation and would like VSA-SEMP to perform a site visit, I can be reached at 802-229-1017 or by email at [SEMP@VTVSA.org](mailto:SEMP@VTVSA.org).*



# Are Public Schools Ready to Pay for Performance?

School districts and state legislatures throughout the United States have debated the value of pay-for-performance models for professional staff and administrators. It is believed by some that financially rewarding outstanding performance will improve the retention of high performers and motivate staff to continuously seek improvement. This article will examine the pros and cons of pay-for-performance models as they relate to administrators in public education.

A pay-for-performance plan begins with the establishment of goals for individual employees tied to job responsibilities and organizational objectives. The development of individual goals requires employees and supervisors to discuss current performance, set measurable short- and long-term objectives and provide the appropriate training and supervision to assist with the attainment of goals. In turn, the individual annual performance is assessed against the defined goals.

The pay-for-performance process also provides a framework for the dialogue between low-performing employees and their supervisors in terms of specific and measurable means of improvement. In these cases, supervisors can develop goals directly aligned with district-wide initiatives while simultaneously addressing individualized areas of weakness. It is believed that with the tangible reward of increased compensation for improved or high performance, employee motivation and workplace engagement will improve.


As it relates specifically to retaining high performers, a pay-for-performance model allows exceptional employees to earn competitive wages over time. The benefit of this, as mentioned earlier, is current employee retention and future employee attraction. With more competitive pay practices, some predict that high-performing individuals will have greater earning potential earlier in their careers.

With the positive aspects of pay-for-performance established, it is worthwhile to look at some of the drawbacks.

Critics of pay for -performance argue that applying individual increases based on performance to a team-centered organization potentially could disrupt the organizational culture by altering the team-based focus. This, in turn, may disrupt the relationship between colleagues who "compete" against each other, thus discouraging a more collegial environment.

Another potential shortcoming of pay-for-performance is the perceived political nature of higher increases given to certain employees and not others. With the tendency of employees to discuss the implementation of such systems, variations in pay actions may result in resentment and misunderstandings. Therefore, organizational leadership must be trusted as objective and competent observers of performance in order for employees to support the pay-for-performance model willingly.

Also, the district must consistently communicate the reasons behind the use of this compensation strategy and at least annually describe how it will be maintained or appropriately adjusted. Failure to communicate with clarity creates a vacuum within the organization that often is filled with employee suspicion about the integrity of a pay-for-performance strategy.

The pros and cons lead to the question: Is a pay-for-performance plan more appropriate for your organization? Districts have answered this question differently with some using a hybrid approach that incorporates both an increase in one's base pay with additional financial rewards driven by the previously established goals which allows high performers to earn additional compensation. When a well-planned and clearly communicated pay-for-performance plan is administered and maintained, this system can motivate employees to take on new challenges and continue career progression in the educational field. 

*Excerpted from the PSBA  
School Leader News  
March 9, 2007*

To register for any of the VSBA workshops or to purchase a DVD please visit [www.vtvsba.org](http://www.vtvsba.org) or call 800-244-8722

VSBA will bill your supervisory union or school district upon request.

The following workshops are available on DVD from VSBA. Sit back, relax, grab some popcorn and enjoy some school board professional development:

- ◆ Collective Bargaining
- ◆ School Board Member Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships
- ◆ The Role of the School Board Chairperson
- ◆ Developing the Budget
- ◆ Passing Your School Budget

To order call VSBA  
800-244-8722

VERMONT  
EDUCATION  
LAWBOOK

School law at  
your fingertips!

Vermont School Boards Association

\$31 + shipping for  
member school districts

# Link Between Effective Communication and Student Success

*By Bob Noyed, APR, President,  
National School Public Relations Assoc.*

Over the years, I have had many opportunities to work with school board members, superintendents and other school leaders in districts across Minnesota and the nation. In most of these districts, there has been a recognition that communication is a critical part of making strong connections between a school district and its community residents.

While this still remains true, a recent review of educational research has clarified a more significant role for an effective communication program. According to a white paper recently released by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), communication to boost parental involvement and develop better understanding of what schools do is critical to student achievement.

The white paper, **How Strong Communication Contributes to Student and School Success: Parent and Family Involvement**, compiled and reviewed research investigating the links between effective school communication and parental and community involvement. It is part of the Communication Accountability Project (CAP) that NSPRA has initiated to demonstrate that an effective communication program is essential for every school district to be more effective.

"The research leaves no doubt that well-planned and effective ongoing communication from schools makes a significant impact on student achievement and parent and community involvement," said Rich Bagin, APR, executive director of NSPRA. "Parents and family can make a huge difference in student achievement when schools and homes are working together through collaborative and competent communication."

In addition, the white paper reports a number of performance issues that are

linked to school communication and involvement. These performance issues include:

- ◆ Higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests
- ◆ More classes passed by students
- ◆ Higher enrollment in more challenging academic classes
- ◆ Better attendance by students
- ◆ Improved behavior at home and at school

Because of these links, we can no longer view communication by schools and school districts as an option or a luxury. It needs to be seen as a critical function of every district—large and small. An organized plan to develop strong and positive relationships between the district, parents and community residents needs to become a common document for every district.

One of the other major findings in the white paper is a call to action for every district to train its employees to be more effective communicators. According to the research, schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, test scores grew at a rate 40 percent higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach. Here are a few ideas to improve the connection between teachers and parents:

- ◆ Start with training - Many teachers and other school employees may not understand how to most effectively and efficiently communicate with parents. Providing basic communication training to these employees is a great first step.
- ◆ Establish expectations for communication - If communication is going to be seen as important by teachers, it needs to be an expectation of every teacher. Working with a group of teachers, establish an expectation of how often teachers need to commu-

nicate with parents and hold employees accountable to this expectation.

Communicate in small pieces, not big chunks—Long, complicated newsletters and other materials are not usually widely read by parents. Provide information in smaller pieces so it is easier to understand, and make your communication to parents more regular.

- ◆ Take advantage of technology - More and more parents have access to email, either at home or work. Sending a short email once a week or once every other week is a cost-effective way to share information. Give them a two or three sentence summary of what you want them to know and then provide a link to your web site that includes more information.
- ◆ Focus on key messages - Determine three or four key messages or ideas that you want to communicate to parents and community members and repeat them on a regular basis. It is easier for us to remember information if it is focused on specific messages.

In case you are not yet convinced of the power of communication, the research indicated that community support contributed to the following positive changes in schools:

- ◆ Upgraded school facilities
- ◆ Improved school leadership and staffing
- ◆ Higher quality learning programs for students
- ◆ New resources and programs for students
- ◆ New resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum
- ◆ New funding for after-school program and family support services

*LINK ... (continued on page 10)*

The issue of time is often cited as an obstacle to implementing more comprehensive communication strategies. It is true that placing a greater emphasis on communication at the school and district level will take more time than doing nothing. However, when we examine the impact of an ongoing communication effort on a district, it is clear that investing more time and other resources will yield tremendous value.

While most school districts have some communication activities in place, what is often missing is a sustained communication program. Effective communication cannot happen once or twice a year, or just be connected to a referendum. Here are a few ideas to improve your district's communication program:

◆ **Assess your district's communication program** - Conduct an audit of your communication effort and find out what's working, what isn't working and

what needs to be done to make your effort more effective.

◆ **Develop a communication plan** - If you don't have a plan, effective communication will never happen. Layout your communication objectives and then develop strategies to meet each objective.

◆ **Identify and seek out opinion leaders** - There are people in every community who are able to influence others. Identify these people and regularly communicate with them so they can share information with others in the community.

◆ **Explain reasons behind decisions** - It is not enough to communicate the decision or issue. It is necessary to help people understand the reasons behind a decision and process taken to arrive at the decision.

◆ **Communicate from the inside out** - We need to communicate with both internal and external audiences, but all communication should start with internal audiences. Your own staff is already helping you communicate with parents and community members.

◆ **Make communication and building relationships part of everyone's job** - No one person can do this alone. Everyone needs to know that they are a critical part of the district's communication effort.

Communication from schools and district must be seen as an investment in the greater success of students. It is not an option, but a integral part of every high-functioning school district. 🚗

*To receive a copy of the NSPRA white paper, send an email to [whitepaper@nspra.org](mailto:whitepaper@nspra.org). Bob Noyed, APR, is currently the president of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). He is also director of communications for Wayzata Public Schools. He can be reached at [robert.noyed@wayzata.k12.mn.us](mailto:robert.noyed@wayzata.k12.mn.us).*

## Student Interns Connect to Real Jobs

by Glenn Patterson, TIPS Coordinator

In January 2005 **Linking Learning to Life (LLL)**, in a partnership with Ben and Jerry's, launched a pilot program, **Training Interns and Partnering for Success (TIPS)**. The purpose of the TIPS program is to provide youth with hands-on, supported work experience preparing them for paid work at an area business. The program includes a six week pre-employment skills course and a 40 hour internship placement in a business which, after successful completion, leads to paid summer employment.

During the pre-employment skills phase LLL staff work with the program youth to help them learn and practice the soft skills such as understanding diversity, conflict resolution, problem solving, workplace expectations, safety and employee/employer rights. After completing the pre-employment training program the youth move onto their internship placements.

Through observation, inquiry, supported trial and error experience, debriefing with a supervisor and eventually performing tasks independently, a student can gain confidence while learning to maturely accept feedback on their performance. Internships also allow students to acquire skills at an individual pace while allowing the flexibility to explore areas of interest. An internship with a hosting of organizations can provide real life work experiences that go beyond what is possible in a school setting. After successful completion of the internship the host employer agrees to hire the youth for paid summer employment.

For the first year of TIPS, six youth from Burlington High School participated. Four of these youth went on to work at the Ben and Jerry's downtown scoop shop, one enrolled in another training

program and one left Vermont for the summer.

Today TIPS has expanded to serve youth in six area high schools with seven local businesses. Students have served as interns in such businesses as Burlington Telecom, ECHO Center for Lake Champlain, the Vermont Lake Monsters, MP 1 03 Radio Station, the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps. and of course, Ben & Jerry's. Most recently Ben and Jerry's expanded their partnership with LLL to include placements in their Waterbury plant/scoop shop in conjunction with Harwood Union High School. 🚗

*If your business is interested in sponsoring youth and partnering with LLL in our TIPS program, please contact TIPS Coordinator Glenn Patterson at [gpatters@bsdvt.org](mailto:gpatters@bsdvt.org) or at 540-0952.*

# 2007-2008 School Board Professional Development

5/2/07	School Board Chair @ VIT	9/24/07	Franklin/Lamoille Regional Meeting
5/12/07	3R @ Montpelier-VSBA Office	10/8/07	Preparing the Budget @ VIT
5/29/07	3R @ VIT	11/1-2/07	Annual Conference @ Capitol Plaza
9/5/07	Orange/Washington Regional Meeting	12/12/07	Conducting Board Hearings @ VIT
9/6/07	Chittenden/Grand Isle Regional Meeting	1/7/08	Budgeting PR @ VIT
9/10/07	Essex/Caledonia/Orleans Regional Meeting	2/6/08	Improving Board Operations @ VIT
9/13/07	Windsor/Windham Regional Meeting	3/10/08	Board Member Swap Shop @ VIT
9/17/07	Addison Regional Meeting	4/16/08	Governance Options and Enrollment Projections @ VIT
9/19/07	Bennington/Rutland Regional Meeting		

## Workshop Descriptions:

### 3R (Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships)

If you've recently been elected to the school board, you're one of approximately 250 new board members who have assumed the responsibility for overseeing the delivery of high quality education for students in your community. If you want to assure your success as you take on this important leadership role, and you'd like to acquire new skills and more knowledge, turning to your state association for assistance is a great first step to help you hit the ground running.

### School Board Chair

The board chair role is critical to the effectiveness of the board and the overall leadership team. The board chair must be well organized, run crisp meetings, develop a strong collaborative relationship with the superintendent, and be able to read the pulse of the school and community. If you're a new board chair or just want to increase your board leadership skills, then plan to participate

### Regional Meeting

VSBA, like all membership organizations, depends on participation from you — local school board members — for its strength and vitality. The primary purpose of VSBA's regional meetings is to provide you the opportunity to provide important input and representation to the Association by electing members from your region to serve on the VSBA Board of Directors and Resolutions Committee. VSBA Board provides direction and support for the programs and services offered to the member boards, while the Resolutions Committee rec-

ommends positions on various issues that the Association membership acts upon at the Annual Meeting. Please join us at your regional meeting to discuss ideas and issues and to help shape the Association's future.

### Preparing the Budget

Agenda includes: Preparing the groundwork, Decide on a budget advocacy strategy, Budget Buddies, Key Communicators Group, Getting the public on your side before you need them, Analyze key cost drivers, Health insurance, Special education, Per pupil expenditures, Common Level of Appraisal, see a budget development interactive template, Linking budget development to Act 68 Action Plan priorities, Connecting long range strategic planning with budget development, Full budget disclosure – grants and other revenues, Understand what to look for on monthly expenditure and revenue reports

### Conducting Board Hearings

Learn mechanics and strategies for running effective school board hearings, including student discipline, employee grievance, and dismissal hearings.

### Budgeting PR

As your school budget nears completion and you begin to see the impact that fuel costs, health care, special education and other economic factors will have on 2007-08 school operations, it's time to prepare your budget passage strategies for the annual school district meeting.


### Improving Board Operations

Strategies for getting the new board off to a good start following Town Meeting includes board reorganization, board development activities, effective meeting management, streamlining the decision making process, and dealing with difficult behaviors

### Board Member Swap Shop

Bring your own topics for discussion, receive feedback from experienced board members, and participate in interactive television dialogue that will help your leadership team grow. Here's your chance to pose questions and receive advice from school leaders who may have already "been there and done that!"

### Governance Options and Enrollment Projections

Find out why and how other districts/supervisory unions are studying governance change options. Learn more about projecting future student enrollment trends. 

## What is VIT?

Vermont Interactive Television (VIT) is an interactive network consisting of 15 sites statewide. All participants can view the presenter and ask questions. The sites are Bennington, Brattleboro, Castleton, Johnson, Lyndonville, Middlebury, Montpelier, Newport, Randolph Center, Rutland, Springfield, St. Albans, Waterbury, White River Junction, and Williston .