Equipping Boards to Drive Student Learning

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ALABAMA
ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL BOARDS

1

At the Board Table

2

The Board's Role in Student Learning

3

Reading: Gateway to Success

State of Alabama Reading Proficiency in the Third Grade

College Readiness: Statewide Percentage of 11th Graders Who Benchmarked in Reading, 2016-17 ACT Administration

Left chart values: 35%, 35%, 37%, 38% (years 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017)

Right chart values (Reading (22)): 30%, 12%, 18%, 40%
Legend: All Students, African American, Hispanic, White
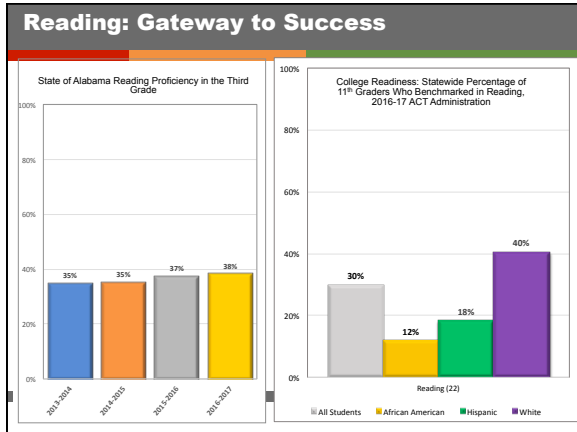
Reading: Gateway to success

How would YOU feel if your child or grandchild wasn't learning to read?

5

A successful reader

Paul
8th Grader
Reads at about the
75th percentile

6

Observations and Implications

Eighth grade proficient reader: Paul

- What did you notice about his reading skills?
- How well do you think he does answering comprehension questions?
- What do you think class time in academic subjects feels like?
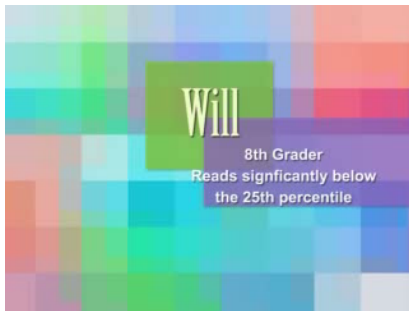- What do you think homework time looks like for him?

7

A struggling reader

Will

8th Grader
Reads signficantly below
the 25th percentile

8

Observations and Implications

Eighth grade non-proficient reader: Will

- What did you notice about his reading skills?
- How well do you think he does answering comprehension questions?
- What do you think class time in academic subjects feels like?
- What do you think homework time looks like for him?

9

What If Nothing Changes?

- What will likely happen to Will in high school if nothing changes?
- What's ahead for him **after high school** if nothing changes?

10

But something DID change for Will

11

What changed:

Will's Reading Comprehension Scores on Gates McGinite Reading Assessment
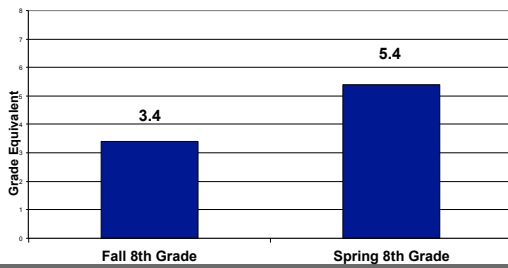
12

Do we feel the urgency?

"Every child can learn. Every school can ensure the success of every child."

13

If we truly believed that every child could learn under the proper circumstances…

We would be relentless in the search of those circumstances.
We would

- Use well-validated instructional methods and materials
- Empower educators to use those methods and materials with intelligence, flexibility, and fidelity
- Involve teachers in constant, collaborative PD activities to continually improve their abilities to reach every child.
- Frequently assess children's performance to be sure that all students are on a path that leads to success
- Ensure we are able to respond immediately if children are not making adequate progress.
- Try different instructional approaches, tutors or other intensive assistance if what we were doing wasn't working.
- We would involve parents in support of their children's school success

14

If we truly believed…

"…**If we truly believed that all schools could ensure the success of all children**, then the failure of even a single child would be **cause for great alarm** and **immediate, forceful intervention**."

15

How many do you need to see?

"How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of all children? If your answer is more than one, then I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that basic pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background…

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that.

Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far."
Ron Edmonds, educator and researcher

16

Creating a Sense of Urgency

17

The Lighthouse Study

18

The Lighthouse Study

- Boards were sorted into two categories:
  - *Moving*: Student achievement was on the move and far above the norm
  - *Stuck*: Student achievement was static and below the norm

19

Stuck and Moving Boards

Stuck Boards
- In low-achieving districts: the board, administration and staff are vague or unable to describe the system's priorities and goals.
- They are unable to describe how (or even if) groups come together to accomplish system goals

Moving Boards
- In high-achieving districts: the board, admin & staff can describe the priorities/goals and what is being done to improve student learning.
- They also can describe how different role groups are organized and work together to accomplish the work.

20

Stuck and Moving Boards

Stuck Boards
- Board members referred to *external pressures as the reasons for working to improve*. For example, state mandates or "not wanting to have the lowest test scores" were cited as reasons for improvement efforts.

Moving Boards
- Board members seemed to feel an internal desire to improve.
- They talked about the *importance of improving education for the sake of students*.

21

Stuck Boards

- "Stuck boards" are characterized by **accepting beliefs**
  - Accepted limitations in students and the school system
  - Tended to view students as limited by characteristics such as their income or home situation, and accepted schools as they were.
- Stuck boards focus on **managing the school environment**, rather than **changing or improving** it
- They see obstacles as road blocks instead of hurdles
- They are reactive, not active or pro-active

22

Moving Boards

- "Moving boards" are characterized by **elevating beliefs**
  - Higher expectations for students
  - Aspirational beliefs about
    - **What is possible** for their students
    - What their schools have the power **and** capacity to do to improve student learning.
- Moving boards are **unwilling to accept ANY excuses for student learning**.

23

Stuck and Moving Boards

Stuck boards have Accepting Beliefs	Moving boards have Elevating Beliefs
• "With the kind of students we have, we are going to have low achievement scores." • "You can't overlook the need for parents to send better kids to our schools."	• "This is a place for all kids to excel. No one feels left out." • "Sometimes people say the poor students have limits. I say all kids have limits. I believe we have not reached the limits of any of the kids in our system."

24

Activity: Elevating and Accepting Beliefs

Brainstorm/Real Talk

3 things we as a board do that are "moving"	3 things we as a board do that are "stuck"
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

25

7 Conditions for Positive Change

1. Connections across the system
2. Knowing what it takes to change student learning
3. Workplace support for staff
4. Professional development
5. A balance between district-wide direction and building-level autonomy
6. A strong community connection
7. Distributed leadership

READY FOR CHANGE

26

The Dozen Danger Signs

Ineffective school boards --

1. Are only vaguely aware of improvement initiatives and seldom can describe actions being taken to improve learning.
2. Focus on external pressures as the main reasons for lack of student success (poverty, lack of parent support, societal factors, lack of motivation).
3. Make negative comments about students and teachers.
4. Micromanage day-to-day operations.
5. Disregard the agenda process and the chain of command.
6. Are left out of the information flow, with little communication between the board and superintendent.

27

The Dozen Danger Signs, continued

Ineffective school boards --
7. Describe a lack of parent interest in education or barriers to community outreach.
8. Look at data from a "blaming" perspective, describing teachers, students and families as major causes for low performance.
9. Have little understanding of coordination on staff development for teachers.
10. Are slow to define a vision.
11. Do not hire a superintendent who agrees with their vision.
12. Receive little professional development together as a board.

28

Digging Deep into Danger Signs

Share out:
- What danger signs do you think your board-superintendent team is most likely to (or may already) fall victim to?
- How can we work to overcome these danger signs? What has to change?

29

The Board's Perspective

What is the role of the forest ranger in the fire tower?

30

The Five Roles of the Board for Improving Student Learning

31

5 Roles of the School Board

1.Set clear expectations

Learn as a board-superintendent team

Hold the system accountable

Build the public will

Create the conditions for success

32

1. Set Clear Expectations

33

1. Set Clear Expectations

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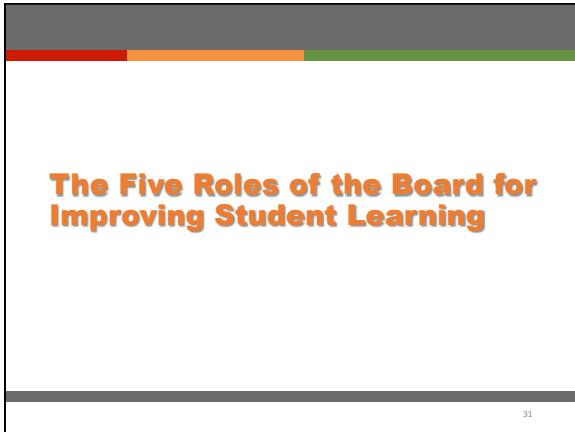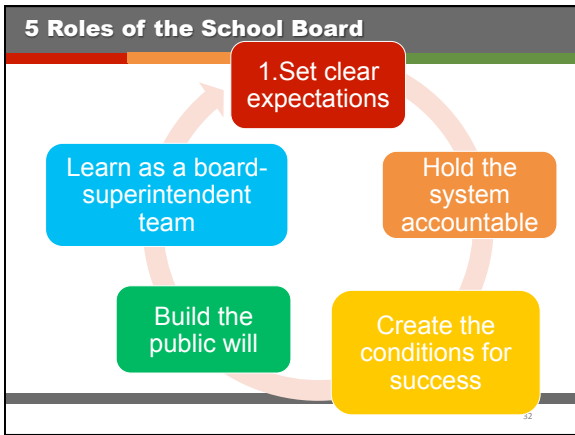
1. Set Clear Expectations

- **Identify a shared vision**
  - Get clear about the greatest student learning needs – the most important content area to improve first
  - Establish a clear and narrow focus for improvement – clarify improvement goals and specific targets
- **Provide a "blueprint" for the system**
  - Set the example by focusing on student learning and improved teaching

35

1. Set Clear Expectations

- **Establish systemic effect**
  - Believe more is possible and communicate high expectations for all staff and students
  - Ensure that your policy manual reflects your expectations

36

1. Set Clear Expectations

Our greatest hope:

Why are those hopes not being realized now?

What needs to change?

37

2. Create Conditions for Success

38

2. Create Conditions for Success

- **Reciprocity of Accountability**
  - Essentially, the person (or team) in charge cannot ask something of subordinates without ensuring that the subordinates have the capacity and resources needed to complete the request
  - The person in charge should expect to be educated by the subordinates of exactly what is required to accomplish the desired goals

39

2. Create Conditions for Success

- Demonstrate commitment to the improvement focus through board actions and decisions
- Support quality professional development
- Stay the course
- Support & connect with districtwide leadership
- Develop and nurture the board/superintendent team leadership
- Ensure all parts of the system are aligned around the learning needs of students (curriculum, instruction, assessment; goals, actions, resource allocation; etc.)
- Align your district policy manual to support these conditions

40

2. Create Conditions for Success

1. **What are you currently asking of your staff?**
2. **Are they meeting your expectations? How do you know?**
3. **What are you willing to support going forward so that they can meet your expectations?**

41

3. Hold the System Accountable

I didn't say it was your fault

I said I was going to Blame you

42

3. Hold the System Accountable

- **Mandate high standards**
  - Adopt goals that will improve student learning
  - Address educational inequities
  - Establish provisions for assessing progress
  - Ensure student achievement goals have been met
- **Establish a moral imperative**

43

44

Taking ownership

- A moving board DOES NOT
  - Blame teachers
  - Blame staff
  - Blame parents
  - Blame students
  - Blame predecessors
  - Blame each other
- A moving board identifies problems, chooses a target, and clears the path for its staff and students to rise up.

45

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3. Hold the System Accountable

- **Pressure and Support**
  - Use data extensively
  - Determine what you will accept as evidence of progress/success
  - Monitor progress regularly
  - Apply pressure for accountability
  - Ensure that policies articulate expectations of the board and system

46

3. Hold the System Accountable. . .

What will we accept as evidence of progress toward expected outcomes?

47

4. Build Public Will

48

4. Build Public Will

Inform • Involve • Invest
- Create awareness of the need
- Create urgency around the moral purpose of improvement
- Instill hope that it's possible to change
- Connect with the community
- Ensure that the board has policies related to communications and community involvement

49

4. Build Public Will

What will we need to do to gain community support for this work?

50

5. Learn Together as a Board Team

- Establish board learning time
- Learn together
- Talk to each other
  - Extensive board conversations
  - Disagree agreeably
  - Set the tone for the system and community
- Develop a willingness and readiness to lead and allow others to lead
- Build commitment to the improvement focus through shared information and discussion
- Establish board policies that encourage board development
- Engage in deliberative policy development – model good leadership of the system through your policies

51

5. Learn Together as a Board Team

What information does the board need to ensure the right decisions are made?

52

Role of the Board – The Focus Framework

Learn Together as a Board Team	Set Clear Expectations	Create Conditions For Success	Hold The System Accountable	Build Public Will
What information does the board need to ensure the right decisions are made?	What are our greatest hopes for the district in this area?	What are we willing to support to ensure the expectations can be met?	What will we accept as evidence of progress toward expected outcomes?	What will we need to do to gain community support for this work?

53

Bringing the GAP Work to your System

- AASB's Governing for Achievement Project can help your team build its governance capacity and focus on improving student outcomes.
- GAP is a 12 month/5 session commitment
  - Ideal timeline is January to December
  - Working January to December splits the cost over two fiscal years
- Governance Act compliance
  - January to December allows all members to meet 100% of Governance Act compliance for two training years with 100% participation (absences will affect satisfaction of Governance Act compliance)

54

Want to know more?

Contact Susan Salter, AASB Director of Leadership Development

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