Effective School Board Member Characteristics

Research findings on school board effectiveness can be applied to individual board member characteristics and beliefs. More specifically, studies give us a clue as to the individual characteristics that are seen in stable and more effective school boards. The point of importance is that more stable school boards with less turnover, experience less superintendent turnover, more stable principals and teachers, and higher student performance. While change is sometimes needed to improve a board, frequent turnover and contentious relations among board members are counter-productive. The following table lists the board member characteristic, a brief description, the preferred (stabilizing) disposition, and a practical description.

Board Member Characteristic	Brief Description	Stabilizing Characteristic	Practical Description
1. Understands Role Boundaries	Understands the difference between the role of *oversight* and *micromanagement*.	*Oversight* with knowledgeable critique and advocacy.	If confronted by a parent in the store, the board member can explain school needs, applied interventions, and current success data. Avoids generalities or playing the role of cheerleader or critic.
2. Trustee vs. Delegate	A *trustee* speaks for themselves and assumes a personal mandate due to their election. A *delegate* speaks for all stakeholders and maintains constant, open communication with a broad constituency.	*Trustee* With the ability to shift to Delegate in times of chaos	The board member seeks out input from multiple and varied stakeholders and seeks open dialogue. However, when conflict arises, the board member has the wisdom to maintain order by discouraging contentious communication tactics.
3. Interest- vs. Position-Driven	A *position* is often polarizing and identifies "friends" and "enemies". An *interest* is often hidden and needs to be discovered. Often one solution can satisfy multiple interests.	*Interest-Driven*	The board member avoids declaring allegiance to named organizations or ideologies, but seeks to understand multiple and conflicting interests of all constituents and seeks a solution that can satisfy multiple interests.
4. Broad Student Concern	A stated responsibility to insure *all students are afforded social justice*. Avoids focused justice for single categories of students or needs.	*Social justice for all students*	The board member avoids focusing only on a narrow agenda of student issues and needs. Board member avoids focusing only on particular student demographic groups and issues.
5. Contextually Minded	The understanding that the local school district, and each school has *unique and shifting needs*; often requiring *non-standard solutions*.	Recognizes *Contextual Need* Supports *Creative, Non-standard Solutions*	The board member avoids reacting to national education issues and focuses on identifying local needs. The board member avoids promoting standardized solutions and prefers to design a solution to fit the unique need of each school as supported by data evidence.
6. Understands Visibility & Influence	The board member understands they possess *no individual authority.* Power rests in the board as a group only.	*School board entity influence*	The board member avoids communicating directives or interests to individual school district employees. Visits to schools are unobtrusive, informational, and as part of established

			activities (sports, open house, school events).
7. Use of Voice	Does the board member use their voice to **tell and sell** their position or do they seek to listen, understand interests, and discover **resolution and reconciliation**?	Uses voice to **listen, resolve, and reconcile**	The board member avoids over-talking to promote their own interest. They do not see communication as a competition. They promote civil dialogue with a goal to listen and discover a resolution that serves all interests.
8. Perception of Power	**Power Over** is using your position to get your own way through threat or reward. **Power With** is using your position to ensure all voices are heard and collaborative solutions are guaranteed.	**Power With**	The board member uses their power to ensure that all needs are heard and that solutions meet multiple interests. They would not attempt to push only their own solutions or highlight only their own needs and interests.
9. Preferred Decision-making Style	Decision-making can be done **individually** and quickly or can be done **collaboratively** with and through others.	**Collaborative**	The board member seeks to evaluate data to confirm issues and needs, then ensure that proposed solutions and measures fit the stated needs and goals.
10. Motivation for Service	Board members can serve for **personal** or for **altruistic** reasons.	**Altruistic Service**	Board members do not run for reasons of personal ego or prestige, a need for involvement, to correct a personal concern, to replace particular school employees, or as a step to future office. Board members run to serve the community, to fulfill a democratic responsibility, and to serve all students and all needs.

Research Support

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