



TEXAS
BUSINESS
& EDUCATION
COALITION

Testimony
In support of Senate Bill 777

By
John H. Stevens, Executive Director
Texas Business and Education Coalition
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The Texas Business and Education Coalition (TBEC) supports enactment of Senate Bill 777 by Senator Van de Putte and we urge your support for a favorable recommendation from the Committee.

One of the most important principles of public education in Texas and across America is local control through elected school boards. Local citizens, and especially parents, want to have a direct voice in the organization and operation of their public schools. That voice is exercised by elected trustees who make very important decisions regarding the personnel, programs, buildings, budget, tax rate and other important matters affecting their local schools and community. Because we believe so strongly in the governance of public schools through locally elected boards, we are committed to strengthening and improving that aspect of the system.

Business leaders that support TBEC have a history of involvement in their local schools in addition to their interest in statewide issues. A number of them have served or serve currently on local school boards. We believe that their experience in leading large enterprises, managing budgets and sizable workforces, and being accountable for results enable them to make particularly important contributions to school district governance. They also understand the balance between governance and management and know that the Board and top administrators must work together as a team if the enterprise is to perform up to the expectations of its stakeholders.

For the record, TBEC believes that the vast majority of trustees serving on local school boards in Texas are constructive and responsible citizens who seek only to do what is right for the students and their communities. With relatively few exceptions, they carry out their work without scandals, acrimonious personal relationships, or questionable actions that characterize the worst governance situations across the nation. In fact, only a small percentage of Texas school districts experience governance problems that requires outside intervention.

Those instances are troubling, however, and Commissioners of Education have spoken out on the need for state policy to provide greater guidance for the governance function in public schools. When he was Commissioner of Education, Jim Nelson, also a former President of the Texas Association of School Boards, said in a speech that a law may be needed to clearly define the duties of local school board members to avoid some of the political and other conflicts he has had to resolve as commissioner. The present Commissioner, Dr. Shirley Neeley, has also spoken out about the need to clarify the role of school boards.

TBEC supports this legislation because it will provide the Commissioner an important tool to intervene in those school districts where governance problems occur, but also because it will help to strengthen the overall performance of Texas school boards and increase their contributions to improved public school performance in our state.

The major feature of the bill is to pull together in one section of the education code the major responsibilities of local school boards and list them just before a similar list of the major responsibilities of district superintendents. It does not diminish in any way the authority of school boards to make decisions on behalf of local citizens, but emphasizes the most important aspects of their role in the operation of school districts.

The legislation emphasizes the responsibilities of school boards and superintendents to establish academic and financial goals for the district, monitor results, and intervene when and where performance is lacking. It clearly states that the board is responsible for holding the superintendent accountable for district performance results. By laying out the major responsibilities of the board and its relationship with the superintendent and clarifying that trustees do not have authority to act as individuals, the bill provides useful guidance for all school boards and gives the Commissioner a tool for intervening in those situations where governance problems persist.

Senate Bill 777 is consistent with the recommendations resulting of many studies across the nation about how to improve public school governance. I have attached documents to my testimony that call for actions like those in this legislation. They include:

- An article from the Journal of the National School Boards Association
- An excerpt from a policy statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development
- An excerpt from a report of the Task Force on School District Leadership of the Institute for Educational Leadership
- An article about the policy governance model advocated by John Carver, a noted consultant on public school governance

We thank Senator Van de Putte for her leadership on this issue and ask that all members of the Committee join in recommending Senate Bill 777 for enactment by the Texas Legislature.

Thanks you.

Superintendents and Boards:

NOT YET PERFECT TOGETHER

IMPROVING THE OFTEN ROCKY RELATIONS between school boards and superintendents so that they can work together more effectively to improve student achievement was a frequent topic at the Wallace Funds' Third Annual LEADERS Count National Conference.

Nearly seven out of ten superintendents believe their boards interfere where they shouldn't, and two-thirds think that "too many school boards would rather hire a superintendent they can control," according to a recent national survey by Public Agenda sponsored by the Funds. Conference participants learned of several activities, initiatives and ideas to create more productive, harmonious relationships between boards and school administrators.

...Good board-superintendent relationships should be a result, rather than a primary purpose...

Anne L. Bryant,
Executive Director,
National School Boards Association.

"Superintendents complain about mismanagement and the hours spent with boards," said James Harvey, Senior Fellow at the Center for Reinventing Public Education in Seattle. "We want states to set ground rules for board behavior." Anne L. Bryant, Executive Director of the National School Boards Association, added that school boards must come up with strategic goals and find a superintendent who is aligned with those goals. Having a strategy means that a good board-superintendent relationship will be a result, rather than a primary purpose.

Richard Goodman, who is directing a project in Raymond, NH to create a model program of collaboration between school administrators, board members, business leaders and parents with support from a Wallace Funds "Ventures in Leadership" grant, said that three states—Massachusetts, Kentucky and Tennessee—have passed laws delegating all personnel matters to superintendents. "This is controversial," he said, "because boards often want to nominate candidates."

Mike Kiefer of the University of Michigan-Flint, said some boards are starting to use a "civil meeting" checklist to self-assess their behavior during meetings.

Goodman and others pointed out that school board members often lack serious preparation for their roles in district governance. At the same time, few superintendents receive any graduate training in working effectively with boards. A recent

Texas A&M study recommends state laws limiting board member terms to six years and mandating training programs.

In 2000, the California School Boards Association adopted Professional Governance Standards which describe commonly agreed-upon principles of effective governance in three areas: the individual trustee, how individual board members and the superintendent must work together, and the specific jobs that the board must carry out. (*For more details visit www.csba.org*)

The New England School Development Council, under Goodman's leadership, has been developing a set of "school board-superintendent leadership team principles" it hopes will be used by school of education faculty to improve the preparation of school leaders, by state associations of school boards and superintendents in leadership workshops, by state boards and commissioners to update certification regulations, and by local boards and superintendents to help them adopt policies aimed at creating smooth-running leadership teams.

In line with the principles being developed by the Council and discussed by Goodman at the conference, there are specific tasks that board-superintendent leadership teams should carry out. Among them:

- Involving the community, parents, students and staff in developing a common mission for the district focused on learning and high achievement;
- Advocating on behalf of students and public education at the local, state and federal levels;
- Providing community leadership on educational issues by creating strong links to other local organizations and agencies;
- Adopting, evaluating and updating policies consistent with the law and the district's mission;
- Maintaining accountability for student learning by adopting the district curriculum and monitoring student progress through a variety of methods including state and national testing. The superintendent recommends the curriculum and measures for monitoring student progress. The board holds the superintendent accountable for student achievement;
- Evaluating and improving its own leadership effectiveness. This includes participating in frequent leadership team retreats and professional development focused on improving board/superintendent governance for high student achievement. ❖

Excerpts from -- "Putting Learning First: Governing and Managing the Schools for High Achievement"

A policy statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development (CED), 1994

CED believes that our education governance system, as currently operating, is a serious barrier to improving our schools. Yet, governance has been one of the most neglected areas of education reform. Few major reform initiatives of the past ten years have attempted to define the roles and responsibilities of different levels of governance or to improve the abilities of the individuals and institutions responsible for making critical educational decisions.

Although the state governments have the ultimate authority over education, the local school board is the primary institution of American education governance. Public confidence in school boards is at an all-time low. The United States has nearly 16,000 separate school districts, and boards of education nationwide are awash in bitterness and contention as they wrestle with divisive political and social agendas. Instead of giving clear academic direction, most school boards are micromanaging their schools' day-to-day operations. Many of America's public school systems are facing governance gridlock. They are preoccupied with, and sometimes paralyzed by, nonacademic issues.

We strongly support local governance of schools but stress that there must be a major overhaul of the role and operations of local school boards. Local institutions are best able to formulate policy to meet the different needs of different communities. This does not imply that we support "business as usual" at the local level. On the contrary, local school boards must stop micromanaging individual schools and become true *educational policy boards*, with the responsibility to set achievement goals, provide resources and incentives to achieve those goals, and ensure accountability.

the states must play a decisive part in framing the roles and responsibilities of boards. **States should provide legislative guidance on the appropriate roles of school boards in accomplishing their primary mission of academic achievement.**

Accountability must be enhanced in all school board restructuring and reform. Parents, citizens, and educators need to know who is responsible for the financial health of the schools, the educational direction the schools are taking, and the results they are achieving.

The actual form that governance takes, such as whether school boards are appointed or elected, is less important than whether policy makers clearly understand their responsibilities and have the capacity and the incentives to carry them out. The following are the essential tasks for those who govern education. They are obligations, not guidelines, and none can be ignored. Those in charge of overseeing our schools should:

- First, and above all, state clearly to the community that learning is the fundamental goal of schools.
- Ensure that all policies support learning and achievement and that they are well coordinated and coherent.
- Set goals for achievement, based on state and national standards, to guide the performance of students and school personnel and monitor student achievement to measure progress in attaining these academic goals.
- Ensure that resources are adequate to meet stated goals.
- Delegate responsibility and authority, including the authority to innovate within appropriate guidelines, and hold those with such authority accountable for making progress toward achievement goals.
- Design and implement incentives that reward teachers, students, and administrators for improving learning and establish more effective methods for dealing with teachers and administrators who perform poorly.
- Maintain vigorous communication with parents and the community to stress the importance of learning and to involve families and others in the learning enterprise.
- Coordinate policies and activities with related government and private institutions that are responsible for child development, health, welfare, and other services.
- Support, gather, and disseminate research and information that help schools develop educational programs to fit their students' needs and give parents a means to evaluate their schools.

**Excerpted from: *Leadership for Student Learning:
Restructuring School District Leadership***

A Report of the Task Force on School District Leadership
Institute for Educational Leadership, February 2001

What little attention the problems of school district governance and leadership have received in the current era of highly publicized school reform has centered mostly on problem-plagued large urban systems. Yet an undeniable need exists to create and adapt strategies, styles and examples of effective leadership to meet the unique circumstances of all types of school districts. Across the coun-

The discussions of the Task Force on School District Leadership yielded a broad consensus that the three often overlapping (and equally often complementary) kinds of leadership described here represent the range within which most school district leadership operates. A good leader should be able to use elements of all three.

Organizational Leadership

The main leadership forces facing district leaders are organizational. Leaders must be able to establish expectations or norms of teaching and learning for administrators and teachers alike while building organizational systems to support them and maintaining a professional climate that encourages practitioners to continue to learn. Developing and managing the resources necessary to support the instructional system must be high-level priorities at all times. And holding professionals responsible for implementing quality instruction in classrooms and schools in order to reach desired goals is non-negotiable.

Public Leadership

Effective communication among board members, superintendents, district and school staff, as well as parents, students, and community members is not only essential, it can make the vital difference between success and failure.

Instructional Leadership

Establishing a clear vision for teaching and learning is the first critical step in planning by any school district. Around the objective of high achievement for all students are arrayed often incompatible goals, values, and strategies. The latter include equity and access for all students; creating safe, nurturing learning environments; providing educators with professional development opportunities (a chronically undervalued need) as well as resources on effective curriculum and practice; making effective use of instructional technologies, and using accountability measures to spur student improvement.

Policy Governance Leadership

The chief feature of the policy governance “model” is its strict delineation of the roles of the board as policy-maker and the superintendent as administrator, as explained by Atlanta consultant John Carver, who notes that “one without the other is unfair.”

Under the policy governance arrangement, school boards should:

- serve as the general public’s trustees and purchasing agents for education, and be held fully accountable for the performance of the superintendent and the school system;
- act collectively and assert authority only as a full board, not individually, declaring that staff may ignore directives and requests from individual board members;
- treat the superintendent as a chief executive officer who wields exclusive authority over his or her staff and who is exclusively accountable for meeting board expectations;
- authoritatively prescribe “ends” so that neither the public nor the superintendent are confused about what is expected of the school system;
- provide the superintendent with bounded freedom for determining “means,” so that the superintendent is empowered to devise and take whatever reasonable steps he or she deems appropriate to reach goals established by the board;
- define goals and limitations in descending order of specificity, beginning in the broadest possible terms and incrementally adding detail, until members are satisfied to allow the superintendent full discretion within the stated parameters; and
- evaluate the superintendent in terms of the performance of the school system against criteria set by the board.

It is an issue that deserves as high a priority as any of those that currently dominate the education debate such as higher standards, tougher tests, accountability, improved teacher quality, smaller class sizes, safety and discipline, and other non-negotiables. But it is impossible to imagine any community achieving sustained positive results for children unless the adults in charge at the district level are using the same playbook as they work toward shared goals.

“There is something [in the system] that does not allow good people on boards and as superintendents to do their jobs.”