

The New York State School Board Association Convention is an annual multi-day event that brings together school board members, district leaders and stakeholders from across the state to learn about and discuss educational topics.

Chrissie Onofrio
11/21/2024

Pre-Convention Board Officers Academy 2024: Transforming District Culture Through Intentional Leadership

Link to Supplemental Materials

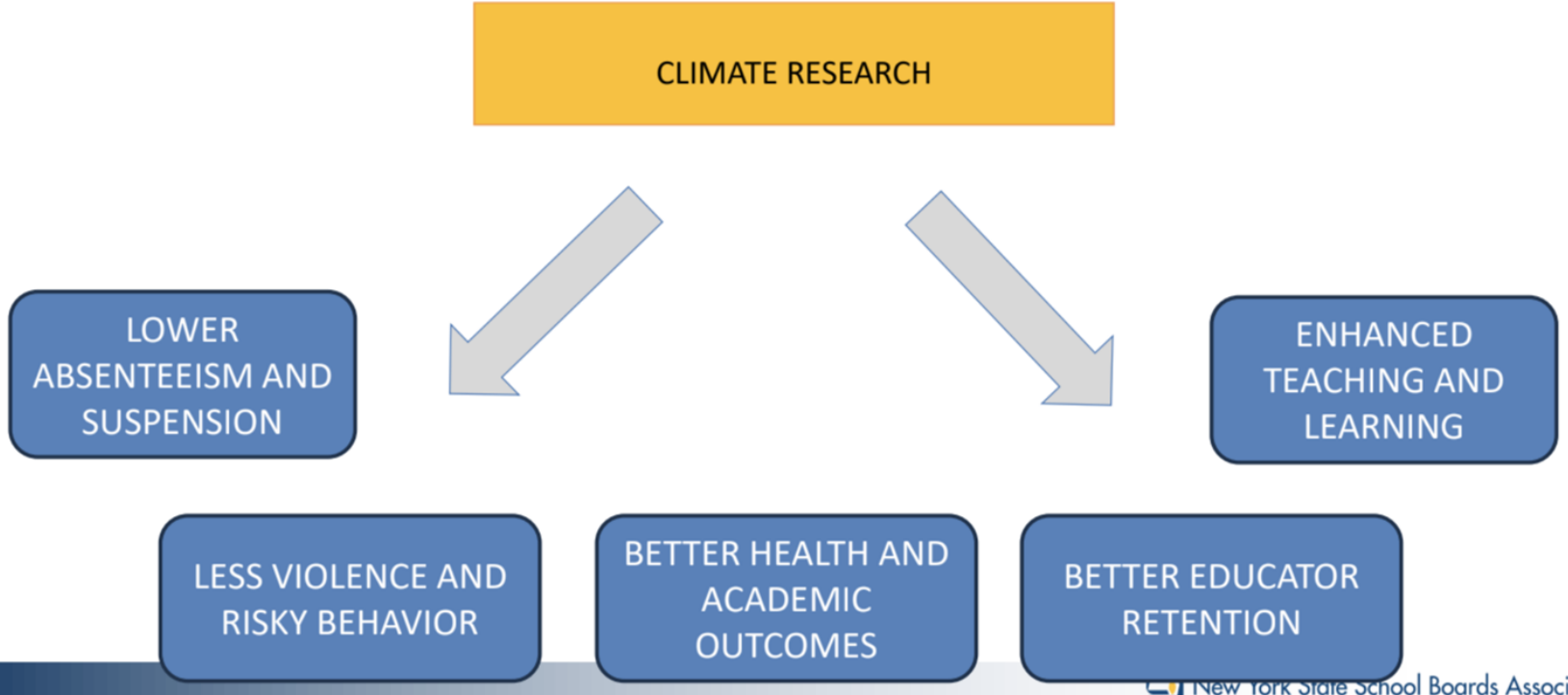
Link to Board Officers Academy Presentation Slides

Keynote Address: Overcoming an Erosion of Trust - Scott Levy – Past President Westchester Putnam SBA; Board Member, Byram Hills Central School District; Visiting Fellow, Harvard Graduate School of Education

- Challenges school boards face
- Shared insight into how school boards can leverage these challenges to strengthen district culture
- Ways effective governance practices can impact and influence the relationship between the board and the superintendent

Recap: Erosion of Trust Societal Trends	
• Polarization & politicization • Decline in local media • Meetings go viral • Community social media	• National influences • Campaign funding • Board structure • Confusion about board's role

Why Is District Climate Important?



Source: *School Climate: Research, Policy, Teacher Education and Practice*, Teachers College Record (January 2009).

Our Challenge

Students

- HS students:
  - 75% are exhausted, have difficulty sleeping, get headaches
  - 30% of females seriously considered suicide
- 69% increase in students seeking mental health services

Teachers

- From 2009-23:
  - Teachers "very satisfied" dropped from 59% to 20%
  - Teachers "Fairly or very likely to leave profession" rose from 17% to 35%
- Those "very satisfied" feel seen as a professional, have control/influence over teaching and some policy influence

Superintendents

- Superintendent turnover increased from 14% to 17% (2021-22)
  - *Approx 80% did not take another position in their state*
- Half of the 500 largest districts saw turnover between March 2020 and Sept 2022

Sources: Challenge Success, CDC, Merrimack College Teacher Survey, Rachel White (Educational Researcher 52, no 5, July 2023), "High Pace of Superintendent Turnover Continues" (*Education Week, 9/19/23).*

Boardroom Dynamics

McKinsey and NACD study identified 4 fault lines that threaten boardroom dynamics during a crisis

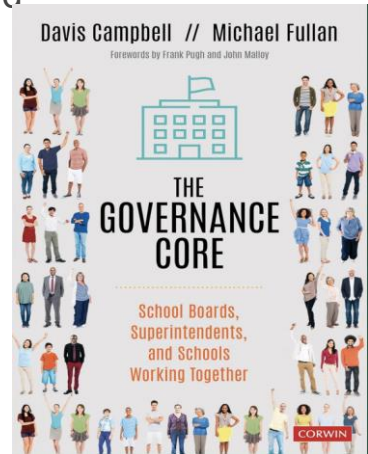
Overreliance on administration	• Be willing to have candid and challenging discussions • Exercise proper corporate governance responsibilities
Board micromanagement	• Remember board role of oversight, strategy, policy, accountability vs day-to-day management
Maintaining relationships	• Crises amplify board dysfunction and strain relationships • Foster trust; manage conflict
Information flow	• Maintain frequent and clear communication • Maximize transparency – no surprises

Source: McKinsey/NACD study, 2019.

Pre-Convention Board Officers Academy 2024: Transforming District Culture Through Intentional Leadership

Session 1: How Shared Identity Can Build Culture and Transform Your Community: One District's Journey to Governance Harmony and a Unity of Purpose - Lance Lohman, Superintendent and Victoria Molloy, Board of Education President - Longwood Central School District

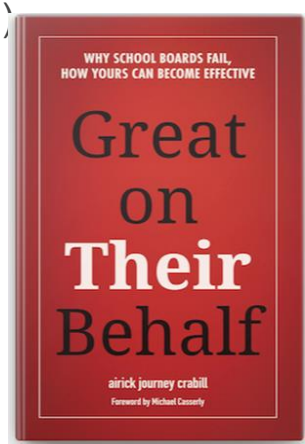
- Discussed their experience in building a strong foundation for school governance and how they leveraged it to establish trust, build strong community relationships, and transform culture.
- We often study successful districts, but don't look at districts that have turned around
- Importance of board coming together as a team and "leading from the balcony, not from the dance floor."
- **Value of creating a Board Member Manual - depersonalizes accountability.**
- Commitment to system wide coherence:
- *Chain of Command - Board Members as Ambassadors and PTAs understanding (helping to shut down toxicity)
- ***"Focus on negative, that's what you'll find!"**



Pre-Convention Board Officers Academy 2024: Transforming District Culture Through Intentional Leadership

Session 2: Why School Boards Fail and How Yours Can Become Effective: The Student Outcome Focused Model
AJ Crabill, Author and Nationally Certified Governance Coach and Cindi McEachon, Board Member, Buffalo Public Schools

- **Student outcomes don’t change until adult behaviors change**
- Focused on the reason school systems exist
    - Not to have a balanced budget (important, but doesn’t matter if students can’t read)
- Distinction between student and adult outcomes and how much time is spent on each
- Adult outcomes are not why school systems exist
- Schools exist to increase what students should KNOW and DO

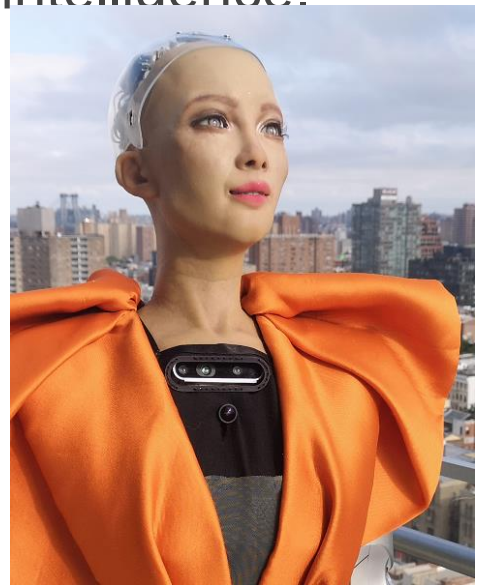


Opening Session

In addition to student musical performances, the highlight of the opening session included meeting Sophia, an extraordinary robot that embodies the fusion of robotics and artificial intelligence.

Also addressed concerns about the use of AI and importance of striking a balance between technology and role of teachers.





Brothers United: How My Brothers Keeper Empowers Students and Fosters Excellence

Link to My Brothers' Keeper Presentation Slides

Members of Uniondale's My Brothers' Keeper (MBK) chapter shared why MBK is so important to them and strategies for building effective MBK chapters in other districts.

- Students shared their heartfelt personal experiences
- Focused on their connections and accountability to one another
- Support not just in school, but in the community
- **“Taught us the humility to receive counsel.”**

What Do You Mean? Evaluating Communications to Build Trust and Transparency

Link to What Do You Mean Presentation Slides

Link to What Do You Mean Presentation Handouts

An interactive discussion that explored strategies to mitigate misunderstandings, avoid hidden bias in communications and foster trust with the community to the benefit of all stakeholders.

Important focus on:

- Chain of Contact
- How to build trust in communication, particularly from community members and how it builds confidence for all
- Importance of consistency and clarity in messaging - talking points on certain subjects
- **Not overly complex, everyone getting same message regardless who they speak to and/or who they are**

Building Trust in Communication

Listen & Acknowledge

Hold Space
Reserve Judgement
Validate
Ask Questions

Educate

Provide Clarity
Share Information
Clarify Your Role
Explain Chain of Contact

Close the Loop

Give Gratitude
Share Next Steps
Share Contacts
Inform Others

Why Might We Fall Short?



Desire to be Helpful



Desire to Avoid Specific Confrontations



Desire to "Speed Up" the Process



As a Personal Favor



To Protect Another's Feelings

DO

- Ask questions
- Reserve judgement
- Share positive information
- Clarify your role as a BOE member
- Correct misunderstandings
- Refer to the appropriate individual
- Share next steps

DON'T

- Compound negative feelings
- Leap to conclusions
- Disparage employees
- Take action outside your role
- Show favoritism or bias
- Skip others on the chain of contact
- Encourage others to skip ahead

WHO SHOULD I CALL?

Have a question or concern? By following this chain of communication, parents, students and community members can get their questions and concerns addressed quickly and efficiently. Contact information is available on the district website at vvsschools.org.

ACADEMICS

Step 1: Classroom Teacher
Step 2: Department Teacher Leader, Liaison
Step 3: Principal or Dean
Step 4: Chris Brewer, Asst. Superintendent
Step 5: Martha Group, Superintendent

ATHLETICS

Step 1: Coach
Step 2: Head Coach
Step 3: Erin Sanchez, Director of Athletics
Step 4: Carrie Hodkinson, 7-12 Principal
Step 5: Martha Group, Superintendent

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS

Step 1: Ron Gregory, Maintenance Supervisor
Step 2: Mark Wixson, Asst. Superintendent
Step 3: Martha Group, Superintendent

EMPLOYMENT

Step 1: April Sobieraj, Admin. Asst. for Personnel
Step 2: Erin Tiffany, Director of Personnel
Step 3: Martha Group, Superintendent

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Step 1: Activity Advisor
Step 2: Building Principal
Step 3: Chris Brewer, Asst. Superintendent
Step 4: Martha Group, Superintendent

FINANCE & BUDGET

Step 1: Mark Wixson, Asst. Superintendent
Step 2: Martha Group, Superintendent

FOOD SERVICE

Step 1: Hollie Ackerman, Food Service Supervisor
Step 2: Mark Wixson, Asst. Superintendent
Step 3: Martha Group, Superintendent

GUIDANCE

Step 1: School Counselor
Step 2: Karen Holton, Guidance Teacher Leader
Step 3: Building Principal
Step 4: Chris Brewer, Asst. Superintendent
Step 5: Martha Group, Superintendent

HEALTH & MEDICAL

Step 1: School Nurse
Step 2: Building Principal
Step 3: Erin Tiffany, Director of Personnel
Step 4: Chris Brewer, Asst. Superintendent
Step 5: Martha Group, Superintendent

REGISTRATION & RESIDENCY

Step 1: Building Secretary
Step 2: Building Principal
Step 3: Mark Wixson, Asst. Superintendent
Step 4: Martha Group, Superintendent

SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Step 1: Building Principal
Step 2: Erin Tiffany, Director of Personnel
Step 3: Martha Group, Superintendent

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Step 1: Building Principal
Step 2: Pat Goodman, Director of Special Ed.
Step 3: Chris Brewer, Asst. Superintendent
Step 4: Martha Group, Superintendent

TECHNOLOGY

Step 1: Building Principal
Step 2: Pat Salisbury, IT Team Leader
Step 3: Mark Wixson, Asst. Superintendent
Step 4: Martha Group, Superintendent

TRANSPORTATION

Step 1: Mike Peck, Transportation Supervisor
Step 2: Mark Wixson, Asst. Superintendent
Step 3: Martha Group, Superintendent

If your issue has not been resolved after following all of the appropriate steps in the communication chain, you may contact the VVS Board of Education by sending an email to the Board Clerk at twhooten@vvsschools.org or calling (315) 829-2520 Ext. 7101.

Strategies for Effective Board Meetings

Link to Strategies for Effective Board Meetings Presentation Slides

Link to Strategies for Effective Board Meetings Handouts

A discussion on research-based strategies and best practices to help make board meetings more efficient, effective and streamlined.

Effective vs. Ineffective Meetings

Ideas to consider:

- Table set up
- Board activity and presentation calendar
- Norms for board meetings
- **Being intentional about celebrating and recognizing positives**

What Makes a Meeting Effective?



Meeting Ineffectiveness

- Straying from the agenda
- Focusing on minutia
- Lack of public comment protocols
- Uninformed or unprepared board members

*Example

Develop Norms for Board Meetings

Board Meeting Norms

The board of education agrees to:

- Arrive at meetings on-time, prepared, and ready to do the work of the district.
- Provide advanced notice, when possible, to the board president and district clerk when attendance at a meeting is not possible.
- Participate in thoughtful dialog without grandstanding.
- Transparently conduct the business of the district.
- Respectfully and intently listen to, but not engage with those sharing comments from the floor (public comment).
- The board president (or vice president, as appropriate) will respond to any and all official and public inquiries directed to the full board; providing official statements and responses on behalf of the full board.
- Be aware of non-verbal communication and the message it sends to the public.
- Ensure that cell phones or other communication devices are not in use at the board table.
- Be respectful of each other's time by being brief and to the point in our comments, adhering to reasonable time constraints and avoiding the repetition of comments already made by other board members.

Harnessing the Power of the Positive Board/Superintendent Relationship

Link to Board/Superintendent Relationship Presentation Slides

Link to Board/Superintendent Relationship Handouts

Research shows a healthy board/superintendent relationship is key to higher student achievement.

In this presentation NYSSBA staff reviewed and discussed common areas of conflict, offered strategies and best practices to help build a positive, lead-by-example executive team culture, and demonstrated how to harness it to foster greater student success.

Key Points:

- Common Vision and Established Goals
- Clearly Defined Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations
- **Clear Processes and Procedures for Communication**
- **Actively Work to Build Trust and Mutual Respect (Same Team!)**
- A Fair, Objective and Thoughtful Superintendent Evaluation
- Importance of Board Self Evaluation

What's at Stake?

The length of a superintendent's tenure has a positive effect on student achievement.

(Waters & Marzano 2006)

The primary reason for superintendents leaving the district is due to a lack of support from the school board or conflicts with individual board members.

(Hendricks, 2013; NYSCOSS, 2017)

Iowa Lighthouse Study: Key Findings

- Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
- Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.



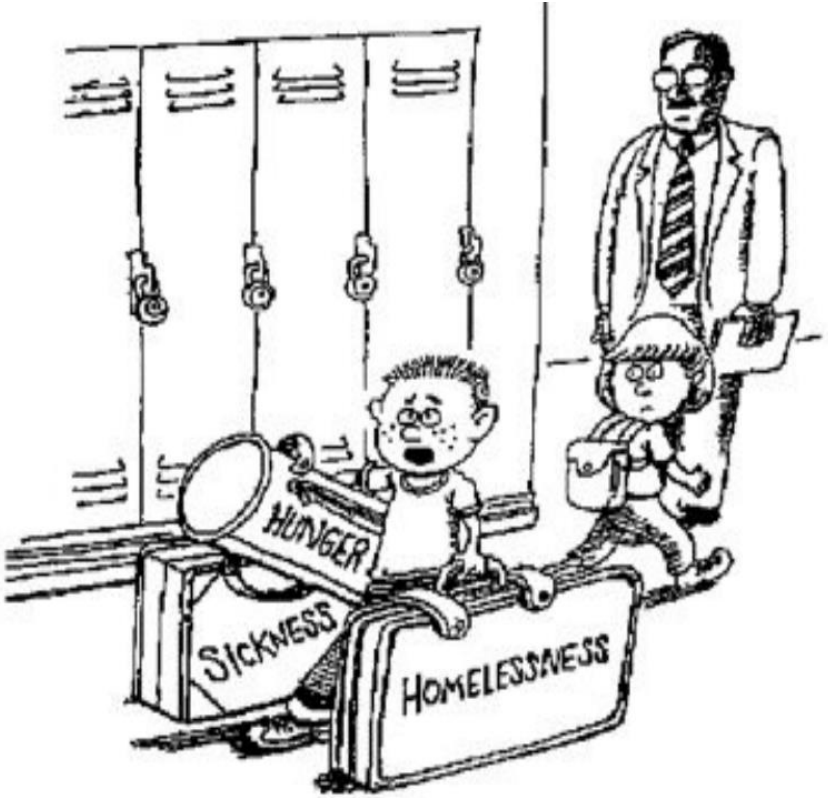
Using the Community School Model to Support Community Well-Being

Link to Community School Model Presentation Slides

Dr. David Mauricio, Peekskill and Dr. Ray Sanchez,Tarrytown shared their collaborative efforts in nurturing social-emotional well-being through the community school model.

- Using schools as hubs - bringing together educators, families, and community to address the needs of the whole child
- Utilizing resources in the community and getting everyone on same page
- **Understanding the story and identity of our students and all the variables that impact academics like sickness, poverty, homelessness, hunger, family issues**
- **Events like Back to School Bash, Saturday Academies with Family Resources but also a chance for families to connect**
- Tapping into the talents of families and students as well

*Side note - Peekskill BOE has matching jackets!



"Could someone help me with these?
I'm late for math class."

Scott Spencer

Conducting Fair and Unbiased Superintendent Evaluations

Link to Superintendent Evaluation Presentation Slides

Link to Superintendent Evaluation Handouts

Began with an overview of the NYSSBA Superintendent Evaluation instrument and process, emphasizing the importance of data in the evaluation process to ensure the superintendent is rated in a manner that is fair, thorough and evidence based.

- Essential Purpose for Superintendent Evaluation should be, “How can we as a board develop and support our superintendent?”
- **An evidence-based evaluation will eliminate evaluator bias, increase credibility, and reduce the opportunities for interpretation**
- *In contact with NYSSBA to support us with training and facilitation of the evaluation this year
- *Super Eval is a platform we can consider using to streamline process

Save the date for 2025

In New York City

October 23 – 25, 2025

New York State School Boards Association