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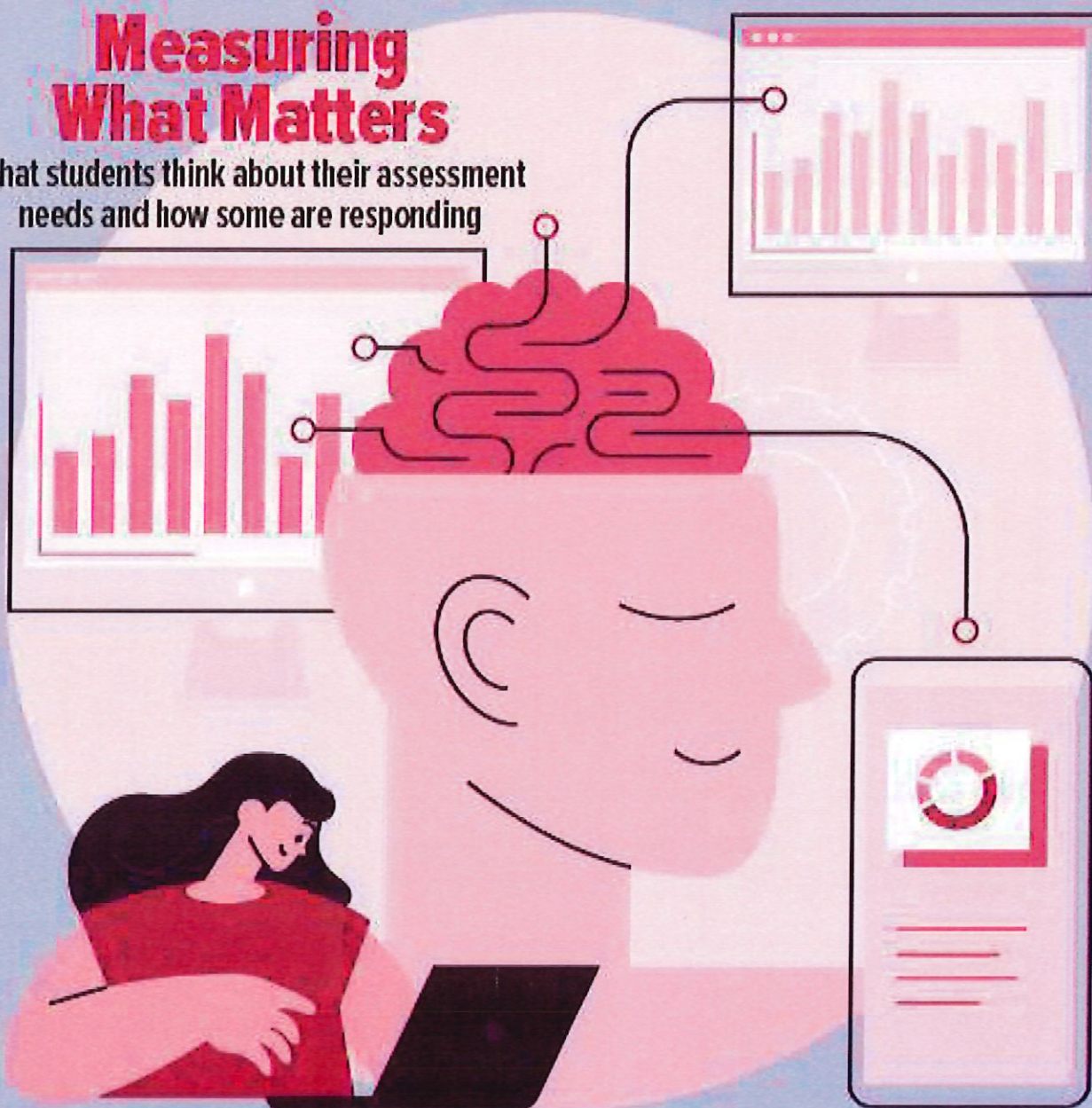
School Administrator

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ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS

Measuring What Matters

What students think about their assessment needs and how some are responding



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Protecting That Healthy Board Now in Place

“Just as we expect educators to engage in professional development, we should expect the same from our board members.”



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I RECENTLY READ an interesting fact that superintendents who have an effective, cooperative board of education can expect an average job tenure of 10 years or more compared to two years or less if the board is dysfunctional.

If you've worked hard to build a trusting, professional relationship with your school board, how are you going to keep things going in a positive direction?

► **Treat your board members like leaders.**

On more than one occasion, superintendents have told me, “I have a great board! They stay out of my way and let me do what I want.” Frankly, that is not a characteristic of a successful governance board. A compliant board may not get in your way, but they also don't add value to the schools.

Make your board members full partners working toward a shared vision. Whether articulated in a strategic plan, long-term goals or district goals, focus the board on the big picture by aligning your board agendas to revolve around the vision. Connect the dots for board members to see how all their decisions affect your progress. Report regularly on progress and don't gloss over improvement needs.

If you want a professional board, you must treat board members as professionals.

► **Commit to continuous professional development.**

A school board that stops learning stagnates. Just as we expect educators to engage in professional development, we should expect the same from our board members. Encourage your board to attend workshops, annual conferences and leadership programs.

Better yet, dedicate time during the year for whole-board training. Bring outside facilitators, such as your state school boards association, to conduct a board self-evaluation. When a board evaluates its own performance objectively, it can spot cracks in the foundation before they become structural failures. Shared learning experiences also serve as powerful team-building exercises, integrating new members and reinforcing the district's core values.

► **Recognize good leadership.**

In districts with strong board leadership, I often see the superintendent going out of his

or her way to extoll the hard work and professionalism of their board. Such recognition encourages a strong leadership culture.

Many state school boards associations have recognition programs for exemplary board leadership. Encourage the board to work toward achieving the award. These recognition programs use metrics that define good board governance, so you also are helping your board members learn what good governance looks like.

► **Avoid surprises.**

If there is a golden rule for sustaining a healthy relationship, it is this: Board members hate surprises, particularly bad ones they first hear about at the grocery store or via a scathing social media post. You need to be careful not to tell them too much, but *no* information is not the right answer.

During a board retreat or self-evaluation, have a conversation about how you and your board will communicate with each other. You can't eliminate all surprises, but you can develop a communications protocols. Prepare talking points for your board when an issue arises to keep members focused on what to convey to their community.

► **Have a board succession plan.**

Elections happen, and members step down. The true test of a healthy board is how it handles transition. A sudden influx of new members can completely alter the dynamics of a high-performing board if you are not prepared.

Develop a robust orientation process for new members. Don't just hand them a massive policy binder and wish them luck. Walk them through the strategic plan, explain current budget priorities and pair them with a veteran board mentor. By proactively onboarding new members, you integrate them into the existing culture of collaboration and governance rather than leaving them to figure it out.

► **Reap the long-term dividend.**

Maintaining a healthy board requires deliberate, daily effort. When you treat your board members as true partners, celebrate their leadership, maintain strong communication and commit to ongoing growth, you create an environment where leadership thrives.