

Knowledge Link >>>

NEW APPROACHES, NEW SOLUTIONS (NANS), INTERVENTION STRATEGIES AND THE ROLE OF SCHOOL BOARDS: A REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Objectives

The review of relevant literature was conducted in partnership with the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. The review focused on synthesizing the evidence on the role of school boards in school improvement by investigating the following questions:

- ▶ What evidence is there that school boards, particularly in disadvantaged areas, have a direct impact on the quality of instruction and student achievement?
- ▶ What innovative approaches are used by school boards in disadvantaged areas that are showing improvement in learning and achievement outcomes?
- ▶ What are the limitations of the current literature that may impact on our ability to prescribe "best-practices" for school boards?



Main Conclusions of Research Findings

Main Findings or Conclusions Expressed	%
School boards have positive impact on reform (e.g., measurable improvements in student achievement, satisfaction, teacher retention, etc.; indicators of success showed improvement in the majority of areas; measures of success improved over several years)	52
School boards have mixed impact on reform (e.g., some measures of success showed improvement others did not, improvements were inconsistent year to year; elementary schools saw improvement but secondary schools did not; researchers explicitly caution that results ranged significantly from school to school)	44
School boards have negligible impact or negative impact (e.g., no observed differences in success indicators, ability to affect change was derailed by challenges faced, researchers descriptors included phrases like: "failed to meet expressed goals", "fell short of requirements", "did not generate the results they were hoping for")	4
Total	100

Examples of "success" indicators used by school boards

- | | |
|---|---|
| ▶ Accessibility of instructional and assessment materials | ▶ Parental participation |
| ▶ Attendance | ▶ Parental satisfaction |
| ▶ Drop-out rates/graduation rates | ▶ Quality of the curriculum |
| ▶ Employee attendance | ▶ Report cards |
| ▶ Ethnic/linguistic gaps in achievement | ▶ School leavers' destinations (work or post-secondary) |
| ▶ Fiscal responsibility | ▶ Student achievement (standardized test scores) |
| ▶ Measures of school climate and safety | ▶ Student satisfaction |
| ▶ Number of graduates gainfully employed after graduation | ▶ Student work (qualitative assessments) |
| ▶ Number of complaints logged at the school board office | ▶ Suspensions |
| ▶ Number of hits on school board website | ▶ Teacher qualifications and educational advancement |
| ▶ Number of volunteers working in the schools | ▶ Teacher retention |
| | ▶ Teacher/Principal satisfaction |
| | ▶ Use of Technology |

The Evidence

A total of 71 findings were identified through a comprehensive search of publicly available literature between 1995 and 2005. The findings included policy briefs, literature reviews, qualitative case-studies, practitioner articles and empirical studies. The review reflected the following findings:

- ▶ There is compelling evidence, although not empirically tested, that school boards can play

an important role in propelling and sustaining educational change, even in disadvantaged communities.

- ▶ High-performing school boards in both disadvantaged and advantaged areas are systematically analyzing data, often on a range of “school success” indicators.
- ▶ School boards can have a positive impact on school

improvement by advocating for change and maintaining a sense of urgency for educational reform.

- ▶ School boards propel school improvement when they help stakeholders move beyond change “rhetoric” to defining goals that will actually be used to guide decision-making.
- ▶ Professional development programs that support new teachers, provide job-embedded training to all teachers and develop principals as instructional leaders were a recurring feature of improved school districts.

Implications for Practice

- ▶ Success indicators should be monitored through systematic collection and analysis of data that is used at all levels to inform decision-making, promote needs-based resource allocation and recognition of success.
- ▶ Professional development planning should focus on long-term objectives and target specific reform initiatives.
- ▶ Professional development opportunities should include

job-embedded training, promote peer collaboration and should address the needs associated with varying stages in a teacher’s or principal’s career.

- ▶ School board leaders need to be vocal and visible advocates for educational change, create meaningful partnerships with the community and recognize and reward successful implementation of reforms.

Questions Arising From Review

What empirical evidence is there that school board policies, practices and programs affect school improvement efforts?

What kind of roles do school boards play/not play in consistently low performing districts?

To what extent does decentralizing decision-making affect the role of schools boards in supporting school improvement?

Reporting on strategic professional development activities

Types of Professional Development Strategies	%
All teachers (e.g., all grade levels, subject domains, levels of experience, etc.)	65
Targeting reform objectives (i.e., not one-shot unrelated workshops)	40
All school principals (e.g., all levels of experience, levels of education, etc.)	35
Multi-year planning for teacher training	23
New teachers and/or new to working in disadvantaged areas.	16