

# Chapter XVI

## *School Board Leadership to Improve Student Outcomes*

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### **Abstract**

School boards can create the conditions for improvements in student outcomes, but this possibility is often not realized due to ineffective leadership practices. Key leadership practices that support the effectiveness of school boards include an aligned focus on student outcomes, setting student outcomes focused goals, routinely monitoring progress toward those student outcomes focused goals, aligning adult behaviors with the student outcomes focused goals, and receiving student outcomes focused coaching. Student outcomes don't change until adult behaviors change -- and that change begins with the school board.

**Keywords:** *Student outcomes; school boards; board of education; school board leadership; effective school governance; educational leadership; school district; alignment; goals; student outcomes focus; goal setting; goal monitoring; coaching*

### **Introduction**

When school boards lead effectively, their work can create the context for improvements in what students know or are able to do -- not by teaching, but by their leadership (Waters & Marzano, 2006; Delagardelle, 2006; Ford, 2013; Lorentzen, 2013; Plough 2014). Unfortunately, many school boards fail to have this impact because their actions are not focused on students' outcomes (CGCS, 2021; Holman, 2016). They fail to set appropriate goals and do not monitor progress toward their goals, even when they authentically believe that they are doing both. Bridging the gap between biased self-perceptions and effective school board governance practice requires training and coaching. But analysis shows that more than 95% of school board annual conference training sessions and mandatory school board member training in all but a few states fails to address these key areas of deficiency. When school boards receive training to distinguish effective leadership behaviors and coaching to support implementation, their work can create the necessary conditions for school systems to improve student outcomes (CGCS, 2021; Howard, 2019; TEA, 2019). This chapter explores five aspects of these challenges and highlights promising practices that can serve as paths forward for school board leaders seeking to intensely focus on improving student outcomes.

#### **1. Align Focus on Student Outcomes**

Political and practical realities can entice education leaders into focusing on adult inputs rather than student outcomes, which leads to declaring victory when adult needs have been satisfied even if student needs have been neglected. A practical understanding of the distinction between adult inputs and student outcomes, when applied to observations of two school board meetings, reveals both the problem and a potential solution.

## **2. Set Student Outcomes Focused Goals**

Much has been written about education leadership, but it is largely written from the perspective of management rather than governance. When leadership lessons written for management are applied in the governance context without translation, the resulting behavior disrupts organizational alignment rather than improves it. Evaluating the “before” goals and “after” goals for a large school district reveals which lessons translate from managerial goal setting to governance goal setting and which lessons do not.

## **3. Monitor Progress Toward Goals**

The practice of setting goals or creating grand plans only to leave both on the metaphorical shelf completely undermines the value of having engaged in either process. A national review of recent school board conference sessions reveals a dearth of training focused on progress monitoring and wide variation based on who is leading the session -- despite evidence suggesting that consistency in monitoring progress towards goals can create the context for improved student outcomes.

## **4. Leadership That Aligns Adult Behaviors**

When school board leaders receive training that helps illuminate which governance behaviors are most and least aligned with improvements in student outcomes, they have a framework that allows them to meaningfully influence the school system’s ability to improve student outcomes. Unfortunately, a review of school boards’ required training across all fifty states reveals only four states where training on student outcomes focus, goal setting, and/or goal progress monitoring is even suggested, and only one where it is required. But that one example has a lot to teach the rest of the nation.

## **5. Coaching That Creates A Space for Changing Adult Behaviors**

Training is important but results come from ideation *plus* implementation. A recent statewide analysis suggests that school board leaders sitting through a workshop alone does not appear to make a difference for students. The gap, however, between common school board practice and the habits of school board leadership that create the context for improved student outcomes is significant. Further, a recent analysis suggests that school boards that attempt to bridge the gap with coaching are likely to experience much higher positive results than those who do not receive coaching.

### **Aligning Focus on Student Outcomes**

We lie all the time -- to children, to others, and to ourselves. And while some of those lies may have only mild consequences, some of them deprive children and ourselves of a healthy grasp on reality. Such is the case with the story of the emperor's new clothes. In this deceptive account, children are led to believe that if they are the one who points out that the leaders are completely lacking in the very things they most pride themselves in having, that things will go well for them. This is often not at all the case.

In the same way that the emperor truly thought himself to be wearing fine garments, school board members truly believe themselves to be focused on student outcomes. When I ask a room of 1,000 school board members whether or not their school board is focused on student outcomes, invariably there will be at least 950 heads nodding in affirmation. These leaders are not attempting to deceive, but as this chapter will explore, their actions do not always align with the intention of improving student outcomes. Thus, it is unsurprising that suggesting to the school board that they are in fact very often not focusing on the outcomes of their students, rather than applause, garners a response that can be quite angry.

The challenge is that school board leaders are saying the words, “student outcomes” but meaning very different things without realizing it. In these moments, the potency that school boards could truly bring to bear goes unexpressed. What school boards need is a more accurate conception of behavior that is truly focused on student outcomes.

### **Inputs, Outputs, and Outcomes**

I love to cook. The most predictable and controllable part of the process is the selection of ingredients. Once you start combining ingredients, it takes skill to create something that actually tastes great. But even the most delicious dishes will not satisfy someone if they have a specific food allergy and can not eat what you have made. This is an example of inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

The inputs are the ingredients. **Inputs** are generally known at the start of a process or cycle and they are the resources and effort applied. Inputs are the most predictable because they are the most easily controlled. Either you buy basil or you do not. Either you have some habaneros or you do not. Inputs certainly come in a variety of qualities as well; not every tomato tastes like a locally grown, vine fresh, perfectly ripe tomato. In a professional kitchen, knowing exactly which ingredients/inputs to select requires a chef of exceptional training. Sure, the investors in the restaurant may provide the funding to purchase the produce, but you certainly don't want them at the farmer's market telling the chef which peppers to buy. Selection of inputs is clearly a job for professionals, not amateurs.

The completed dish is the output. **Outputs** are generally known in the middle of a process or cycle and they are a measure of the implementation. Having the perfect inputs is no guarantee that you will get the outputs you intended. Just as inputs require expertise, it takes special care and attention to translate a recipe into a culinary masterpiece. Output measures provide feedback, letting you know if you are on track or not so you can take corrective action early. So, if it becomes apparent that the chef cannot create basic dishes, the restaurant investors have clear information that their restaurant is not going to succeed. Seeing that the desired outputs are not being delivered, they know changes need to be made immediately.

But restaurants do not make food for the sake of having made food. The output -- their dishes -- are important but having made the dish is not why restaurants exist. They make it for the purpose of satisfying their guests. This is the outcome chefs intend. The **outcome** describes whether or not the intended result was accomplished and is generally not known until the end of the process or cycle. Just because the chef created a great dish does not mean it satisfied the guests and that they will become loyal fans who will return again and again. You need the ingredients/inputs and dishes/outputs, but the measure of a restaurant's success is in whether or not the guests were satisfied. If the inputs and outputs were perfect but no guests were satisfied, the restaurant failed; it did not meet its objectives/desired outcomes.

### **School-based Inputs, Outputs, and Outcomes**

These same ideas hold true for schools. Take a moment and consider: what are the inputs in a school system? Common examples include books, buses, teachers, technology, and so forth. Like ingredients in a recipe, these are the things that are generally known at the beginning of a school year. These are the resources or activities the school system has planned for prior to the students arriving. And like ingredients in a restaurant, great results rely on the professional chef (Superintendent) selecting the appropriate ingredients -- selecting between properly ripened and unripened tomatoes, choosing between appropriate and inappropriate learning materials -- not the restaurant's investor representatives (school board members). Sure, the school board has approval authority for expenditures (inputs) but that is not the same as the board making the selections; selection requires someone with professional expertise.

What are examples of outputs in a school system? Think grade cards, benchmark tests, semester grades, quarterly financials, and the like. These are outputs in that, like dishes in a restaurant, they reflect the implementation and use of the inputs. Work has been done, and the outputs are the demonstration of that work. Outputs are the evidence we can look at in the middle of the school year to get a sense of whether or not things are headed in the intended direction; like grade cards at midterm, they help us know if we are likely to get the desired end of year outcomes. Outputs provide critically important feedback, allowing school systems to course correct without waiting until the end of the year when it is clearly too late. If there is evidence that students have not learned what school leaders expected by midyear, school boards should expect the Superintendent to adjust at midyear.

And finally, think of outcomes in a school system. A common example is graduation rate. But it could also be end of year assessments, balanced budget, retention of effective teachers, construction completion, and many more. Outcomes are the measurable results that schools are aiming for by the end of the year and are a culmination of all the inputs and outputs. Just because people like which inputs were chosen (the “right” pencil, textbook, teacher) does not mean the outcomes will be what was intended. It is essential to recognize that effectiveness and ‘rightness’ cannot be determined by inputs but, rather, only by outcomes. This distinction clarifies why school boards must be invested in outcomes, not just in inputs: school leaders can know everything there is to know about inputs but it will never reveal if the leaders made the “right” choices because only the outcomes can do that. School boards can spend every meeting entirely focused on inputs and that will never reveal whether the intended results were achieved; only the outcomes can do that. Boards don’t drive improvements in student outcomes by hyper focusing on or evaluating their Superintendent based on inputs. They must focus on and evaluate the Superintendent based on outcomes. The school board that focuses on inputs to the exclusion of focusing on the outcomes is a school board that is setting children up to fail.

### **Student Outcomes Versus Adult Outcomes**

Being able to differentiate between inputs, outputs, and outcomes is only the first step. The next step is distinguishing between the two kinds of outcomes that school systems create: student outcomes and adult

outcomes. Student outcomes are the results that school systems create which measure what students know or are able to do. Adult outcomes are results that the school system creates that are not a measure of what students know or are able to do. Still valuable and necessary, but not the same as a student outcome. Is retention of effective teachers an important outcome? Yes! Very important, actually. But it is not a student outcome. Knowing the percentage of effective teachers retained does not reveal whether or not students are more literate or numerate this year. While retention of effective teachers may lead to higher literacy and numeracy, teacher retention is an adult outcome, not a student outcome. In this example, the student outcome that retention of effective teachers might contribute to could be improved literacy and numeracy. But the only way to know that for certain is to measure what students know or are able to do. School boards should never use results about adults in their goal-setting as a proxy for results about students.

Improving adult outcomes is only valuable insofar as they contribute to improvements in student outcomes. If the school board is discussing the fidelity of implementation of the literacy curriculum, it is not discussing a student outcome. Literacy curriculum fidelity is also an important outcome and may increase literacy, but it does not tell a school board leader whether or not *the students* are more literate; only measures of how well students can actually read can do that. When the outcome is implementation fidelity, staff can implement an ineffective program for this particular group of students, and implement it extremely well. That does not mean that what students know or are able to do has improved.

School systems don't exist for adult outcomes; they exist to improve student outcomes. Effective school boards focus on student outcomes (CGCS, 2021). It is important for the adult outcomes to improve as well. But improving adult outcomes is not why a school system exists.

### **Case Study: DeSoto Independent School District**

By May 2020, DeSoto Independent School District (DISD) was in trouble and not merely because of the pandemic. The school board correctly surmised that their district was struggling academically and in need of significant improvement. Observing their May 11th meeting through an inputs / outputs / outcomes lens, it is

clear that the school board's chosen strategy for addressing the situation is to manage the inputs. Pushback on the school board's lack of focus on student outcomes was not well received.

Just as the emperor proceeded to parade, confident in his believed non-nudity, school board members became increasingly engaged in ever more granular detail -- all of it divorced from an examination of actual data describing what students know or are able to do. Table 1 shows the result of utilizing the Inputs / Outputs / Outcomes logic model to evaluate the discussion taking place during each section of the meeting. Completing the analysis provides objective data on how school boards are spending their time and where their attention is focused.

**Table 1***DeSoto ISD May 11, 2020 Meeting - Time Use Analysis*

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Agenda Description</b>	<b>Minutes Spent</b>	<b>Time Use Analysis</b>
<b>Meeting Convenes at 6:31pm</b>			
Item 1	Call Workshop To Order; Pledges and Establish Quorum	4:30	NA
Item 2	Citizen Comments	6:01	Adult Inputs
Item 3	Consent Items	1:08	Adult Inputs
Item 4a	Action Items 9-12 ELAR Textbook Adoption Approval	13:16	Adult Inputs
Item 4b	Consider and Act On An Order Authorizing the Issuance of Unlimited Tax Refunding Bonds; Appointing A Pricing Officer and Delegating To the Pricing Officer the Authority To Approve the Sale of The Bonds; Establishing Certain Parameters For the Approval of Such Matters; Approving An Escrow Agreement, and Paying Agent/Registrar Agreement; Levying An Annual Ad Valorem Tax For the Payment of The Bonds; and Enacting Other Provisions Relating To the Subject	12:06	Adult Inputs
Item 4c	HB 3 Reading Academies Memorandum of Understanding	6:36	Adult Inputs
Item 5a	Possible Action Items HB3 Reading Academies Purchase	28:28	Adult Inputs
Item 5b	Collaborative Classroom Libraries Purchase	32:49	Adult Inputs
Item 5c	2020 Educator Appraisal Waiver	36:14	Adult Inputs
Item 5d	Board Resolution To Address Waiving Local Policies Regarding Ranking/GPA and Employee Evaluations	12:04	Adult Inputs
Item 5e	Technology 1:1 Purchase	38:26	Adult Inputs
Item 5f	Redesign: Competency-based Discovery & Capacity Building	27:15	Adult Inputs
Item 5g	(Part 1 of 2) - Princeton Review Summer Programming	4:53	Adult Inputs
Item 5h	Recommendation Regarding DeSoto ISD Auditor Services	6:07	Adult Inputs
Item 5i	Consider Approval of Resolution Amending Authorized Representatives For Texpool Investment Funds	1:30	Adult Inputs



Item 5j	Board Crisis Priorities	21:04	Adult Inputs
Item 5g	(Part 2 of 2) - Princeton Review Summer Programming	1:47	Adult Inputs
<b>Went into Executive Session at 10:55pm</b>			
Items 8	Executive Session	3:13:00	Unknown
<b>Returned from Executive Session at 2:08am</b>			
Items 9 & 11	Open Session Action Item, Adjourn	26:48	Adult Inputs
<b>Meeting Adjourned at 2:25am</b>			
<b>Percentage of the 5hrs of Public Meeting Focused on Student Outcomes: 0%</b>			

There is much to notice here. First, this one meeting lasted eight hours with five of those hours being in front of the public. Meaningful work can be difficult to sustain after only a few hours; it is hard to imagine that a leader's best thinking will be done at 2am at the tail end of an eight-hour gathering. Second, the exclusive focus was on adult inputs. Third, during the public meeting the item with the largest use of time was a discussion of laptops for students (Item 5e). It may be that school boards are often inclined to spend more time on items that are tangible *because* they are tangible. Student outcomes are not something that can be held in ones hand; district-wide literacy rates are not as tangible a product as textbooks (Items 4a & 5b) and technology.

Perhaps it is unsurprising that this group of leaders could not avoid the nearly inevitable frustration given voice throughout the meeting. From the prosaic (Item 5i, the shortest non-consent item, which was about an obscure financial matter) to the passionate (Item 5f, one of the more contentious items considered during the public meeting), the one consistency is the lack of a student outcomes focus. In this example, it is not merely a confusion between student outcomes vs adult outcomes that is consuming the school board, because they are not discussing adult outcomes either. No school system created results of any kind are the focus of this meeting. In fact, in this instance, paying attention to adult outcomes might actually be an improvement in practice by lending an opportunity to pivot in focus from a discussion of adult-created results to one of student-created results. Instead, the culprit in this meeting is the narrow focus on adult inputs ungrounded by a shared agreement on student outcomes.

Purpose lends meaning to practice. The first thing the DeSoto ISD school board needed to do was acknowledge that it was entirely nude -- that none of its current practices were yet focused on student outcomes. In the absence of a clarifying leadership purpose, little is left to leaders but to squabble over differences in opinion over practice. This DeSoto ISD meeting was unlikely to ever elevate to the level of the leader's intentions not because they are not well intended but because there is not the grounding influence of a clearly defined and honored set of student outcomes against which the various strategies can be evaluated. Without this, instead of having some objective means of determining the merits of the superintendent's proposals, the school board members are left to opine on whatever narrow set of observations they have made from their relevant but disjointed perspectives. Add that unintentional but very real leadership failure to an exhaustingly long meeting and this is a recipe for inspiring the worst in a group of leaders rather than the best.

What is remarkable about the DeSoto ISD story is not where the school board started, however, but where it went next. A few months after this meeting, the school board began the work of reimagining its governance practices. While they had already heard about the difference between adult inputs and student outcomes, evidence reveals that they never internalized the message to the point of allowing it to drive changes in adult behavior.

In the fall of 2020, four months later, the school board began an aggressive redesign of their operating procedures, school board calendar, and school board meetings all in pursuit of a singular aspiration: to become intensely focused on improving student outcomes. The lens for every policy revision and every practice change became: how does this allow us to be more focused on improving student outcomes. If it met that threshold, it stayed. If it did not -- no matter how sacred and beloved -- it was eligible to be scrapped. After several months of labor toward this intention, there was a noticeable shift towards a student outcomes focus (see Table 2).

**Table 2***DeSoto ISD March 22, 2021 Meeting - Time Use Analysis*

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Agenda Description</b>	<b>Minutes Spent</b>	<b>Time Use Analysis</b>
<b>Meeting Convenes at 6:30pm</b>			
Item 1	Call Meeting To Order	0:44	NA
<b>Went into Executive Session at 6:31pm</b>			
Item 2	Closed Session Items	59:00	Unknown
<b>Went into Executive Session at 7:30pm</b>			
Item 3	Public Session, Welcome, Invocation by Pastor, Pledges, Student Recognition	14:51	NA / Student Outputs
Item 4	Public Comments	0:00	Adult Inputs
Item 5	Board Monitoring: Goal #4 Individual Growth (4.1, 4.2, 4.3)	1:05:59	Student Outcomes
Item 6a & 6b	January Tax Collections, January Financials	10:09	Adult Outputs
Item 6c	Administrative Corrective Action Plans	7:09	Adult Outputs
Item 6d	Board Corrective Action Plans	6:02	Adult Outputs
Item 7	Consent Items (All Items Shall Be Acted Upon At the Same Time)	0:38	Adult Inputs
Item 8	Action / Discussion Items (Action Requested)	0:03	Adult Inputs
Item 9	Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items	0:03	Adult Inputs
Item 10	Adjourn	1:13	Adult Inputs
<b>Meeting Adjourned at 9:20pm</b>			
<b>Percentage of the 2hrs of Public Meeting Focused on Student Outcomes: 60%</b>			

To the untrained eye based on the agenda descriptions, these meetings may seem nearly identical. The differences, however, couldn't be more neon. For starters, the more recent public meeting in Table 2 only lasted two hours. Second and perhaps the single most important change to facilitate, the school board shifted to a

commitment of investing at least 50% of each school board meeting to monitoring progress regarding its adopted student outcome goals (Item 5). While this meeting did not provide a highly effective example of goal monitoring (CGCS, 2021), it was a massive shift in that direction. Unlike the previous year's meeting which was painful to watch both for its length and its tone, this meeting was brief and measured. Another noteworthy aspect is the school board's choice to front-load the monitoring of their goals rather than placing it after other business. Doing so allows the school board to monitor student progress early in the meeting to enhance focus.

Hidden in plain sight is another artifact of the school board's student outcomes focus. During this particular month, all of the action items were handled via the consent agenda (Item 7). Consent agendas are a common practice used by governing bodies to address multiple routine business items all at once without the need for individual debate or multiple votes. It is a time saving device used when a board wants to preserve time during the meeting to invest in other matters it deems more needing of the body's attention. Notice that both meetings make use of a consent agenda, but that many items from the first meeting are also handled by an action agenda (Item 5). This two-step practice -- some items on consent agenda and then some on the action agenda -- is actually a highly appropriate and normative practice among school boards. That makes its absence on the March 2021 meeting (Item 8) all the more curious. An investigation of the school board's revised policies solves the mystery.

In order to facilitate an increased focus on student outcomes, the school board began requiring the superintendent to provide all of the board's materials fourteen days prior to the meeting. During the intervening fourteen-day period, board members could submit questions and five days prior to the meeting the superintendent provided a written copy of responses to all of the submitted questions. At that point, board members are then invited to remove items from the consent agenda if they still have questions -- otherwise the item remains on the consent agenda. Either way, a copy of all questions asked and responded to is made available to the public so that inquiry that took place prior to the public meeting is still transparent and available for public consumption. This process revision has allowed the DeSoto ISD board to have the best of both worlds: they still transparently enact a high degree of oversight and review of expenditures, but only the most

vital matters to be discussed by the full board make it onto the action agenda to be verbally discussed. This leaves more time and attention for what these education leaders most want to focus their energies on: to what extent are our students learning and what adjustments are being made to accelerate it?

## **Summary**

The distinction between adult inputs and student outcomes can be transformative in the hands of a determined group of education leaders. The implications for all leaders are clear as well. Organizations exist to improve the out comes of their constituencies. Hospitals exist to improve patient outcomes. Banks exist to improve depositor outcomes. Schools exist to improve student outcomes. Inside the clarity that this taxonomy enforces, organizational leaders are able to discern between the ingredients and the satiation of customers. Only when empowered by this level of clarity can observations about the emperor's nudity be met with invitation — and improvement — rather than derision.

## **Setting Student Outcomes Focused Goals**

The function of the school board is to represent the vision and the values of the community; the ends that the school system must accomplish. The function of the superintendent is to implement the vision and values of the community, as communicated to them by the school board; the means by which the ends are accomplished. Governance in this context requires practitioners whose expertise is in community representation -- people who have a deep understanding of the community's will and the reasons for it. Management in this context requires practitioners whose expertise is in operating large education institutions -- people who have a deep understanding of classroom instruction and the operational systems that support it. This understanding establishes the boundary between governance which is responsible for selecting the ends and management which is responsible for selecting the means. Only when these separate but interwoven functions collaborate effectively can each be its most effective.

When the boundary is imprecise or permeated, managers make policy decisions about community values that they cannot possibly have the context or community understanding for, and governors make day-to-day operational decisions that they cannot possibly have the context or organizational understanding for. In both

cases, the organization experiences dysfunction -- not in the colloquial sense, but in the sense that the functions that need to be accomplished to improve student outcomes are conducted inadequately.

Adding to the challenge is that most texts on effective leadership are penned from a managerial perspective. Boards may read about goal setting but not realize that the advising often focuses on the tactical means, rather than the strategic ends.

For school boards to be effective, they must have goals. But those goals can best create the context for improving student outcomes when they adhere to governance-appropriate criteria.

### **Effective School Board Governance Goals**

The most critical distinction between goals for governing and goals for managing is that governing goals should always describe what it will look like once the organization has taken the next step in the trajectory of why the organization exists. They won't describe how the organization will get there -- that is the domain of managerial goals. Because school systems only exist to improve student outcomes, school board goals should only ever be about what the next tranche of student outcomes will be. Not adult inputs. Not even student outputs. Effective school board goals are only ever about student outcomes -- what students know and are able to do. This is what it means for the school board to represent the vision of the community.

Once the school board provides the superintendent with the goals, the superintendent will need to create management-level objectives for how the goals about student outcomes will be accomplished by the organization. Managerial objectives -- and this is often where confusion starts, because these are often also referred to as goals -- are how the school board's goals cascade throughout the organization from the boardroom to the classroom. Where governance-level goals focus on what the community's vision for children is, managerial objectives focus on how the organization will implement the vision of the community.

An example of the intrusion of managerial practice into governance goal setting can be found in Philadelphia School District's 2018 goals.

### **Table 3**

#### *Philadelphia School District Board Goals, Announced January 2018*

Goal 1: Student Achievement. Our students' potential is limitless. The achievement and safety of our students will drive all of our decisions and we will invest in programs and initiatives that are proven to support all students in reaching their potential

Goal 2: Transparency and Accessibility. Effective school governance requires the intentional inclusion of diverse populations and viewpoints in order to support and strengthen decision making. All voices matter.

Goal 3: One System of Quality Schools. All of our students deserve access to quality schools. While the School Board oversees district schools and charter schools differently, both types of schools exist to provide quality educational opportunities to all Philadelphia students. We will work to make sure that all children attending public schools -- regardless of life circumstances, zip code, behavioral challenges, or disability -- have access to great schools.

Goal 4: Financial Stability. In the end, none of our goals will be possible without balancing the ability to make additional investments while maintaining our financial stability. We will manage our financial resources prudently and seek to secure additional sustainable funding.

Of the four goals in Table 3, only the first one makes an effort at describing why the school system exists. School systems don't exist to be transparent, have quality schools, or be financially stable. These are all important because they are all means to the end: improving student outcomes. But none of them actually describes the end state, they describe critical strategies to be implemented with the intention of achieving the end state. Contrast this behavior with the district's revised 2020 goals.

**Table 4**

*Philadelphia School District Board Goals, Adopted December 2020*

Reading: Every student reads on or above grade level.

Goal 1: The percentage of students in grades 3-8 who are proficient on the state ELA assessment will grow from 35.7% in August 2019 to 65.0% by August 2026

Goal 2: The percentage of 3rd grade students who are proficient on the state ELA assessment will grow from 32.5% in August 2019 to 62.% by August 2026

Math: Every student performs on or above grade level in math.

Goal 3: The percentage of students in grades 3-8 who are proficient on the state Math assessment will grow from 21.5% in August 2019 to 52.0% by August 2026

College & Career: Every student graduates ready for college and careers.

Goal 4: The percentage of students who are proficient on all three state high school assessments (Algebra, Literature, and Biology) by the end of their 11th grade year will grow from 22.2% in August 2019 to 52% by August 2026

Goal 5: The percentage of Career and Technical Education (CTE) students who pass an industry standards-based competency assessment by the end of their 12th grade year will grow from 49.9% in August 2019 to 80% in August 2026

Each of the five goals clearly articulates where the district is starting relative to the community's vision for what students should know and be able to do. The revised goals lack any description of *how* this will be achieved, but that's the point. Effective strategic governance makes the vision of where the organization must get to completely clear, then leaves it to management to determine the most effective means of reaching the destination.

It's also worth noting that the revised goals create more clarity by employing goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, results-focused, and time-bound (SMART). The more exacting the governing body chooses to be, the clearer the delegation of expectation from the school board to the management team. The vague operational objectives from the 2018 "goals" do not accomplish this; the SMART goals from 2020 do.

Effective governance practice doesn't end with goals, however. That's only the beginning. Once a governing team has established goals, the school board's next step is to ensure clarity regarding how progress



toward the goals will be measured (CGCS, 2021). Without a progress measuring system in place, goals will soon be placed on a shelf to be forgotten while the inevitable vicissitudes of daily serving tens of thousands of children conspire to distract leadership attention.

Unfortunately, school boards that adopt management-oriented goals are doomed to adopt management-oriented progress monitoring. This is evident in the Philadelphia school board's work.

## **Table 5**

### *Philadelphia School District 2018 Board Goals, Monitoring Progress*

#### **Goal 1: Student Achievement**

- a. Adopt a set of key indicators of student performance and create a schedule for monitoring these indicators.
- b. Promote student achievement by investing in strategies that create safe, welcoming, and trauma-informed learning environments in every school.
- c. Adopt an effective facilities maintenance program that ensures timely capital investments in order to promote the health and safety of students and staff and to support academic programming.
- d. Attract and retain highly qualified, talented, and passionate staff by implementing policies that build both strong leadership pipelines and capacity within the District.

#### **Goal 2: Transparency and Accessibility**

- a. Establish a committee structure to promote transparency in Board decision-making and create opportunities for public engagement on District matters.
- b. Develop a communication strategy that is transparent about Board actions and welcomes all stakeholders to participate in the Board's decision-making process.
- c. Establish a greater Board presence outside of District headquarters and in school communities.
- d. Explain the processes by which decisions are made, when they are made, who made them, how public input was used, who is responsible for executing the decisions and how success is measured and evaluated.

#### **Goal 3: One System of Quality Schools**

- a. Set and communicate clear standards for a quality education and hold both District schools and charter schools responsible for meeting these standards.
- b. Invest in strategies and policies that grow the ability of all Philadelphia students to access quality schools. Hold schools accountable for practices that impede access.
- c. Advocate for funding and a funding formula that invests in Philadelphia public schools and alleviates inequities between district and charter schools.

#### **Goal 4: Financial Stability**

- a. Adopt a long-term strategy that will allow us to continue to stabilize our finances and make investments in support of teaching and learning.
- b. Educate the public on our financial realities and build a broad base of support for public education that will create a sense of pride in the district and lead to investments in our schools.
- c. Adopt an effective facilities maintenance program that ensures timely capital investments in order to promote the health and safety of students and staff and to support academic programming.

- d. Ensure that all decision-making and investments reflect our beliefs and are in the best interest of Philadelphia's students. Collaborate with stakeholders across the City and Commonwealth around school funding needs.

While each of these activities are likely wise actions to pursue, with the exception of 1a, none of them will ever describe for the school board whether or not the organization's reason for existing -- to improve student outcomes -- is being achieved. The school board that is not routinely evaluating whether or not the vision of the organization is being accomplished is a governing team that is, as previously defined, not representing the vision of the community. The mistake, however, was not in identifying progress measures that aligned to the goals. That represents exceptional attention to duty on the part of the school board. Instead, the mistake was the management-focused goals to which the progress measures were aligned.

Part of the challenge for school boards is that they are frequently assigned non-governance responsibilities by state legislatures and over time have come to identify them -- and adjacent behaviors -- as governance behaviors. But because they were always managerial behaviors, the adjacent activities that they step into also tend to be managerial activities. The classic example of this is the school board's approval of the annual budget. Annual budgets are not governance tools, they're managerial tools. The nature of governance is to be more focused on the ends than the means. Having a great budget is a means, it is not an end. But because legislatures nationwide have obligated school boards to adopt annual budgets through state laws, this is commonly considered to be a governance practice. Absent statutory obligation, school boards would care less about what the superintendent's budget is and more about improving student outcomes. But the current reality is that school boards are generally required to adopt the budget, and without training they will come to associate that -- and adjacent activities like approving expenditures, selecting vendors, negotiating with vendors -- as being governance work. But all of these are adult inputs, not student outcomes. As school boards grow increasingly focused on adjusting adult inputs, it's easy for them to lose track of focusing on student outcomes. Such was the behavior exhibited by the Philadelphia school board in 2018.

The revision of goals in 2020 gave rise to a corresponding revision of progress measures. Notice how, inspired by the goals' focus on student outcomes, the progress measures all focus on student outputs. In this manner, the school board secures for itself the possibility of conducting monthly monitoring into the extent to which student learning is propelling them toward the community's vision.

**Table 6**

*Philadelphia School District 2020 Goals and Guardrails, Monitoring Progress*

**Goal 1: Reading**

- Leading Indicator 1.1: The percentage of students in grades 3-8 who score at or above grade-level on the District's within-year reading assessment in Fall, Winter, and Spring each year.
- Leading Indicator 1.2: Closing the Gap - The percentage of students, by subgroup, in grades 3-8 who score at or above grade-level on the District's within-year reading assessment in Fall, Winter, and Spring each year.

**Goal 2: Reading**

- Leading Indicator 2.1: The percentage of students in grades K-3 who score at or above grade-level on the District's within-year reading assessment in Fall, Winter, and Spring each year.
- Leading Indicator 2.2: Closing the Gap - The percentage of students, by subgroup, in grades K-3 who score at or above grade-level on the District's within-year reading assessment in Fall, Winter, and Spring each year.

**Goal 3: Math**

- Leading Indicator 3.1: The percentage of students in grades 3-8 who score at or above grade-level on the District's within-year math assessment in Fall, Winter, and Spring each year.
- Leading Indicator 3.2: Closing the Gap - The percentage of students, by subgroup, in grades 3-8 who score at or above grade-level on the District's within-year math assessment in Fall, Winter, and Spring each year.

**Goal 4: College and Career**

- Leading Indicator 4.1: The percentage of students in grades 9-11 who score at or above grade level on the District's within-year math and reading assessments in Fall, Winter, and Spring each year.
- Leading Indicator 4.2: The percentage of students who are proficient on all three state high school assessments (Algebra, Literature, and Biology) by the end of their 10th grade year.
- Leading Indicator 4.3: Closing the Gap - The percentage of students, by subgroup, who are proficient on all three state high school assessments (Algebra, Literature, and Biology) by the end of their 10th grade year.

**Goal 5: College and Career**

- Leading Indicator 5.1: The percentage of 11th grade CTE students who pass their CTE Level 2 coursework (with a grade of A or B).
- Leading Indicator 5.2: The percentage of 10th grade CTE students who pass their CTE Level 1 coursework (with a grade of A or B).

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Not all lessons from a managerial approach to goal setting are inadvisable. It's worth noting several of the management-oriented lessons that Philadelphia was wise to adhere to in both sets of goals. In both cases they selected no fewer than one and no more than five goals. This may sound trivial but it is not unusual to come across school boards that have no goals or to come across school boards with more than thirty goals. Both are suboptimal practices that most goal-setting resources -- whether governance-oriented or management-oriented -- will advocate avoiding.

In addition, both sets of goals have between two and four progress measures. While it is recommend to have either two or three, four is not an unreasonable number (CGCS, 2021). And like with goal-setting, having four is a better plan than not having them at all.

## **Summary**

The managerial books on leadership are absolutely right: having goals matters and having progress measures matters. The school board with only one or with neither has abdicated its accountability to the community's vision. But for goals to work at the governance level:

- They must be about student outcomes, not adult input or adult outputs or even student outputs
- There should be between one and five of them
- Each goal should be SMART
- Each goal should be accompanied by two or three progress measures
- Progress measures are only about student outputs, not adult outputs
- Each progress measure should be SMART

## **Monitoring Progress Toward Goals**

Student outcomes don't change until adult behaviors change. Or said differently, when placed in the context of school board leadership, patterns of behavior that are exhibited in the boardroom can reasonably be expected to be found paralleled in the classroom. This concept, which offers a summation of the current literature on school board leadership behaviors and their relationship to improving student outcomes, is as simple as it can be confounding because changing adult behaviors can be challenging.

When school board members are selected, they often come to the role having no practical knowledge about effective leadership in the context of school board governance. Having been an educator doesn't prepare someone to lead in a governance context; at best it just helps understand what the data means. Having served on non-profit boards doesn't prepare someone; few non-profit board members are selected by the general public and few such organizations deal with such vast budgets. Having served on a corporate board doesn't prepare someone; few corporate board meetings are held in public or have labor units intimately involved in board member selection. Instead most school board members arrive with an authentic desire to serve children and little applicable knowledge about how best to do so in this capacity.

One attempt to bridge that gap comes in the form of annual school board conferences which draw in many thousands of school board members each year. The challenge doesn't live in the intention; bringing school board members together to learn can be a powerful opportunity for changing adult behaviors. The challenge, rather, lies in the execution: what is being taught and by whom.

### **What Should Be Taught**

The school board behaviors that most create the context for improvements in student outcomes are setting goals, monitoring progress toward goals, and aligning resources with the goals (CGCS, 2021; Howard, 2019; Waters & Marzano, 2006). The practice of setting goals should be collaborative, should focus on desired student outcomes, the resulting goals should be SMART, and there should be between one and five of them. The practice of monitoring progress toward goals should result in two or three progress measures that are student outputs, that are SMART, and that are predictive of the goals they are intended to monitor. The practice of aligning resources with the goals should involve identifying the most effective educators and the largest available sources of funding, and disproportionately applying both in ways that increase the likelihood of achieving the progress measures and, through them, the goals. But aligning to progress measures cannot happen without first having progress measures. And conducting goal monitoring using the progress measures cannot happen without first having goals. Because of the pivotal role that goal setting and goal monitoring play in

effective school board leadership, these are skills that should be at the forefront of school board member training.

### **What Is Being Taught**

Unfortunately, conference sessions that teach school board members about goal setting and about monitoring progress relative to those goals are rare. After coding more than eight hundred annual school board conference session offerings from 2015-2017, a stark picture emerges [Note: the names of the conference host organizations included in this analysis are excluded for privacy]. Of the many hundreds of sessions offered, the percentage of sessions available that were focused on setting goals, monitoring goals, or even more tangentially on the vague topic of the school board's role in strategic planning is low.

**Table 7**

*Annual School Board Conference Sessions 2015-2017, Topic Focus*

<b>Sessions Focused on Goal Setting / Goal Monitoring</b>	<b>Sessions Not Focused on Goal Setting / Goal Monitoring</b>
3.78%	96.22%

Those results are not a typo. At annual conferences designed explicitly for school board members to attend and receive training relevant to their effectiveness in their leadership role, the percentage of sessions devoted to the school board leader behavior with the strongest correlation to improvements in student outcomes -- setting and monitoring goals about what their students should know or be able to do -- is less than 4%.

The logical question that follows is: what are the sessions about, if not setting and monitoring goals about student outcomes? The good news is that there really are a great number of topics that would be incredibly helpful to school board members. Beyond goal setting and monitoring, there are many other issues where the work is appropriately initiated by governing teams rather than the management team. Board-initiated topics covered during the coded sessions include:

- Superintendent selection based on prior history of accomplishment regarding board goals

- Superintendent evaluation based on progress toward and/or accomplishment of board goals
- Budget alignment with board goals
- Bond election design based on board goals
- How to train future school board candidates regarding goal setting and monitoring

The list goes on. And each of these topics was present to some degree. The bad news is that the majority of session topics were focused on a very different audience: the management team.

Just as there are some issues that are appropriately initiated by the governing team, there are other issues that are most appropriately initiated by the management team. Examples of management-initiated topics include:

- Construction and maintenance of athletic facilities
- Selection of technology
- Selection of textbooks
- Selection of energy systems
- Selection of vendors
- Selection of disciplinary strategies
- Evaluation of teachers
- Evaluation of programs

This list too goes on -- and for quite a lot longer than the board-initiated list of issues. Some issues vary -- they could be appropriately initiated by the board or by the superintendent. These issues include:

- Updates on federal law
- Updates on state law
- Advocacy at the national capital
- Advocacy at the state capital
- Stakeholder engagement
- Board/superintendent relationship
- General topics about leadership

The distinction between board-initiated vs management-initiated is important because even though one group may begin a task, much of the work that is initiated by one group is eventually worked on by another. For example the budget is initiated by the superintendent but later voted on by the school board. And the superintendent evaluation is initiated by the board but at some point includes the superintendent. Few items that are board initiated go untouched by the superintendent at some point in their process and the same is true for much of the superintendent's work. So while there is often not a bright line between which group works on which item, there is often a bright line delineating which group has responsibility for initiating most items.

In the three year analysis, here's the breakdown of session prevalence by audience type.

**Table 8**

*Annual School Board Conference Sessions 2015-2017, Audience Focus*

<b>A Topic That Is Board-initiated</b>	<b>A Topic That Is Management-initiated</b>	<b>A Topic That Varies In Initiation Between Board and Management</b>	<b>Other</b>
19.61%	56.42%	16.63%	7.34%

One concern inspired by this analysis is that the sessions in the conference program were not labeled as being board-focused or management-focused. Unless a board member knew exactly what they were looking for, it would not be immediately apparent to them whether they were attending a session about board-initiated topics or management-initiated topics. Based on these percentages, school board members have a significant chance of attending annual school board conferences and never once being exposed to board-initiated content -- as are the chances of them never even hearing the words goal setting or goal monitoring.

**Who Is Doing the Teaching**

The coded sessions revealed another pattern when coding both the session and the lead presenter. This shed light on a potential misalignment of interests between the lead presenters and the school board members attending the conference.

**Table 9**

*Annual School Board Conference Sessions 2015-2017, Lead Presenter*

<b>Lead Presenter</b>	<b>Percentage of Presentations</b>
School Board Member	9.29%
Central Office-based Staff	20.87%
School-based Staff	3.21%
Students	0.46%



State Association Staff	12.16%
National Association Staff	6.65%
Keynote Speakers	3.33%
College / University Affiliated	3.10%
State / Federal Agency Staff	0.34%
Vendors	40.60%

One explanation for the strong prevalence of vendor-led sessions could be profit motive. Annual conferences for many school board-serving organizations are fundraisers that help sustain the organization’s annual budget. Another potential explanation could be avoiding the risk of alienating members; it is not necessarily beneficial to point out if the emperor is entirely nude.

Additional coding was completed to identify which presenters **were** presenting on goal setting and goal monitoring. Nearly half of all such sessions were provided by staff from regional organizations whose focus is school boards. Superintendents and their staff provided just under a quarter of the remaining sessions and school board members themselves just over a quarter.

**Table 10**

*Annual School Board Conference Sessions 2015-2017, Which Presenters Offered Goal-focused Sessions*

<b>State Association Staff</b>	<b>Central Office-based Staff</b>	<b>School Board Members</b>	<b>National Association Staff</b>
45.45%	24.24%	27.27%	3.03%

This also begged the question about the prevalence of this focus within these presenters’ larger portfolio of sessions: out of all of their sessions, what percentage of those were the goal setting and monitoring-focused sessions?

**Table 11**

<b>State Association Staff</b>	<b>Central Office-based Staff</b>	<b>School Board Members</b>	<b>National Association Staff</b>
14.15%	4.40%	11.11%	1.72%

These results suggest that it's not safe to assume that any presenter will offer a goals-focused session. But regional staffers and school board members themselves offer the highest probability of success. Indeed, every other group -- teachers, students, university professors, government representatives, and especially vendors -- was at 0%.

**Summary**

Unfortunately, the most direct conclusion is that if school board members want to grow in the area that will allow them to have the strongest impact on improving student outcomes, don't attend school board conferences that are dominated by vendors. Or cause the organizations to change and start providing school board members with a more significant dose of student outcomes focused training. If those changes are not made but leaders still choose to attend these conferences, actively seek out goal-focused sessions that are most likely led by staff from region-specific organizations or school board members themselves. Of particular note: if the intention is to learn about adult behavior changes in the boardroom that most correlate with improvements in student outcomes, avoid all sessions by vendors -- which will be quite difficult.

**Leadership That Aligns Adult Behaviors**

Training that is focused on student outcomes is vital, but annual school board conferences are unlikely to provide this type of training. Another place to look for possible training is the state's required courses for school board members. Unfortunately, a review of the professional development requirements that states place uniquely on public school board members -- aside from generic requirements that states have in place for all elected officials -- reveals that this is also unlikely.

The first issue is that many states have no required or even recommended training for school board leaders. Table 12 shows the breakdown of what was found on the legislative websites for all 50 states.

**Table 12***States That Do and Do Not Have Training Requirements As Of May 2021*

<b>States With Training Requirements</b>	<b>States Without Training Requirements</b>
Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia	Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming
Total: 24	Total: 26

But even among the states with school board-specific requirements, not all requirements are created equally. A topical analysis of the requirements shows that among states with training requirements for school board members, the majority of those requirements focus purely on legal and financial matters. To be clear, these are important areas of focus; in many parts of the country the local public school district is the largest employer and/or one of the largest governmental bodies. Ensuring that these outsized institutions are conducting business in a manner that honors the resources and values of the communities they serve is an important part of their job.

But even though legal and financial matters are important, they are not the reason school systems exist. School systems exist to improve student outcomes. If the school system spends 50% less money this year but educates zero children, the taxpayers still did not get a good deal.

The measure of whether a school system is being efficient with taxpayer resources lives in how much student outcomes have improved for each dollar spent. Merely spending less money is not automatically a measure of efficiency. It could, in fact, be a measure of inefficiency because there may be more bang for the buck to spend \$110 and see a doubling in student performance than to spend \$90 and see a halving of student performance. Table 13 shows which states have begun to move in this direction.

**Table 13**

*States With Training Requirements Concerning Student Outcomes As Of May 2021*

States With Training Requirements That Include A Student Outcomes Focus	States With Training Requirements But That Do Not Include A Student Outcomes Focus
Arkansas, Rhode Island, Texas, West Virginia	Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia
Total: 4	Total: 20

Unfortunately, of the 50 states surveyed, only 4 contain an expectation that school board members be trained in student outcomes focused topics -- setting goals about student outcomes, monitoring those goals monthly, or aligning district operations with those goals.

**One Exemplar**

Standing apart from nearly all other states in this conversation is Texas. In 2017, the Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 1566, the first law of its kind in Texas declaring:

1. that school boards are responsible for improving student outcomes,
2. that school board members should have three hours of training every other year regarding evaluation and improvement of student outcomes, and
3. that the state’s department of education would be responsible for certifying individuals who were eligible to lead the three hour course.

The first statutory provision sounds like a no-brainer, but reading state statutes regarding school board duties tells a different story. Often, if such an assertion even exists, it is in amongst a long list of statutory obligations that range from the normal (The school board shall be responsible for hiring and evaluating the superintendent) to the absurd (The school board shall install the accounting software). The second provision creates one of the only statutory expectations in the nation that points toward the school board implementing a focus on student outcomes. And the third provision is exceptional in that while many states require school board trainers to be registered with the state, few conduct significant screening of that registry, and fewer still actively create certification programs for potential school board trainers.

In response to this law, the state department of education created a certification training and a certification test. During the first year of implementation, roughly 60% of those taking the test to become certified school board trainers under the new law failed the test their first time taking it. This degree of expectation regarding the content combined with quality control in the trainer led to Texas' roughly 7000 school board members receiving a standardized introduction to student outcomes focused principles.

## **State Roles**

Mandatory or suggested school board professional development is typically adopted by either a state legislature, a state board of education, or both in collaboration. This analysis does not suggest that state leaders do not care about effective school board governance, but it does suggest that they do not actually know what it looks like (see section above, "Aligning Focus on Student Outcomes"). Creating the expectation that school board members should be focused on improving student outcomes matters because in the absence of clear direction, ambient leadership behavior is likely to have an outsized impact on individual leadership behavior. Said differently a new school board member is unlikely to know what effectiveness in school board leadership looks like, and will often default to imitating the behaviors of other school board members.

Even if state leaders do not mandate professional development that teaches a student outcomes focus, they can create a student outcomes focused framework and invite school board leaders to opt in. Or they can create a legislative framework that aligns the interests of the adults in the boardroom with improvements for students in the classroom. Examples might include:

- Automatic recall elections for school boards whenever student outcomes decline in growth beyond a certain threshold.
- Regional grade cards for school boards that are largely composed of student outcomes data.
- Current student outcomes data being mandated to appear on school board ballots next to the incumbent's name.

Even if regional governments do not take reasonable steps to improve the effectiveness of school board members, school board members can take it upon themselves to lead the conversation. First by seeking out training that is student outcomes focused. And then by advocating for their regions to follow their lead.

## **Summary**

Regional governments are almost entirely non-entities in the conversation about how school boards create the context for improved student outcomes, but they can be. And even in the absence of guidance from regional leaders, local school board leaders can seek out external opportunities for student outcomes focused training, and they can advocate for their regional leaders to learn about options available to them that could truly make a difference.

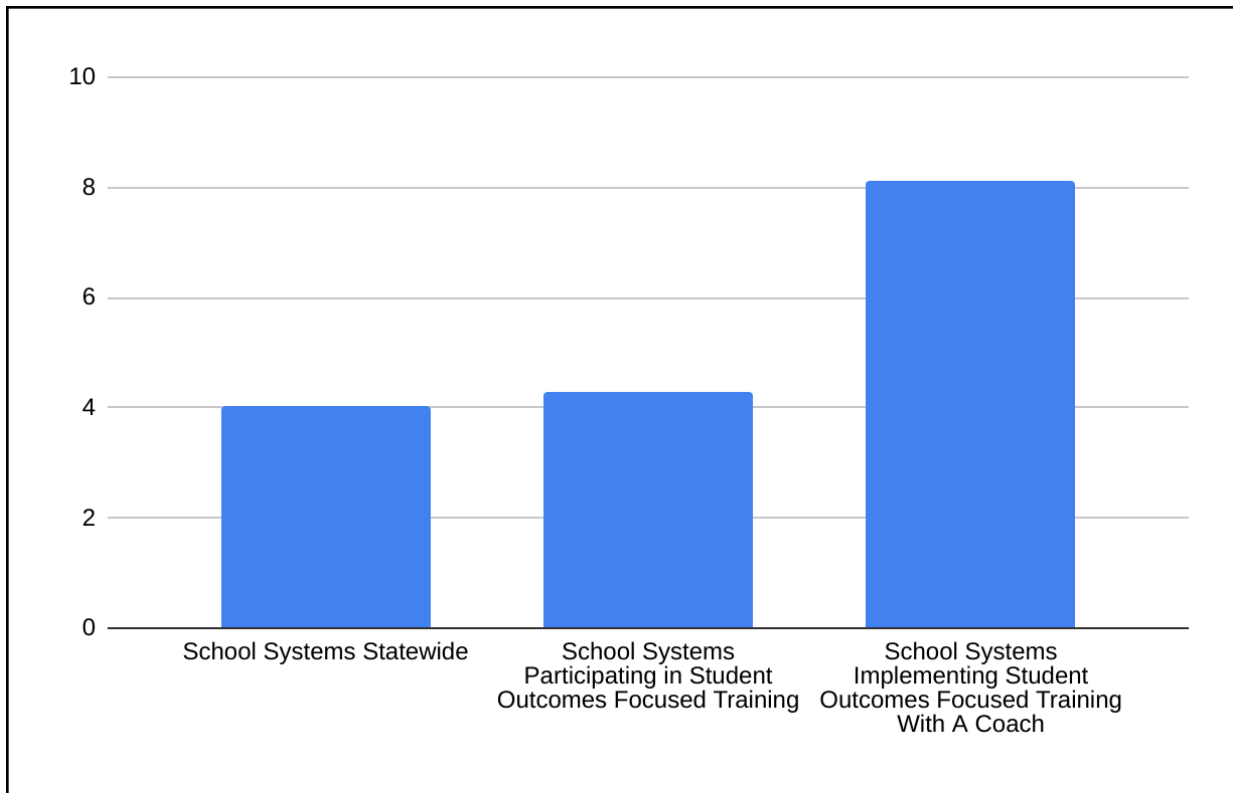
### **Coaching That Creates A Space For Changing Adult Behaviors**

Recapping, this chapter has 1) identified that school boards often are not focused on student outcomes -- even when they think they are -- and that 2) having a student outcomes focus is a prerequisite to crafting effective school board goals. But complicating these observations is the reality that 3) most school board conferences don't help with either of the topics and, 4) neither do most state mandated school board trainings.

The challenge requires even further unraveling, however. Even when quality training is available, it will only take a school board so far. In a report released by the Texas Education Agency based on state accountability data and implementation of the agency's student-outcomes focused Lone Star Governance (LSG) framework for school board training and coaching, the agency found that there was only minor variation in average school system performance between school boards that participated in the framework training (without coaching) and school boards that did not. Training that was student outcomes focused appears to positively correlate with average increases in academic performance, but the magnitude of improvement was slight.

The same report also found that on average, school boards that went through the training and received ongoing guidance from an agency-certified student outcomes focused coach experienced 2x improvement in the state accountability system over a two year period. As shown in Figure 1, while these are extremely preliminary findings (the entire initiative was only begun in 2016 so reliable data remains limited) and suggest a corollary -- though by no means a causal -- relationship, it is fair to speculate that effective coaching that leads to measurably increased student-outcomes focused adult behavior in the boardroom *may* be positively correlated with improvements in system-wide student performance in the classroom.

### **Figure 1**



The key term, however, is “effective”; not just any coaching will do. The measure of effectiveness in coaching is whether the adult behaviors in the boardroom actually change over time in response to the coaching. But to measure adult behavior change, a governance-specific rubric is needed. The agency, recognizing this, designed a quarterly self-evaluation for the LSG coaches to conduct with school boards using a rubric made available in the LSG manual. The excerpt in Figure 2 shows one page of the LSG rubric, this one showing the various conditions that must be met and the corresponding score for increased student outcomes focus. On this page of the rubric, school boards can behave in ways that confer between 0 and 15 points out of a 100 point scale.

**Figure 2**

## TEXAS FRAMEWORK: VISION & GOALS

### Vision & Goals 1: The Board has adopted student outcome goals

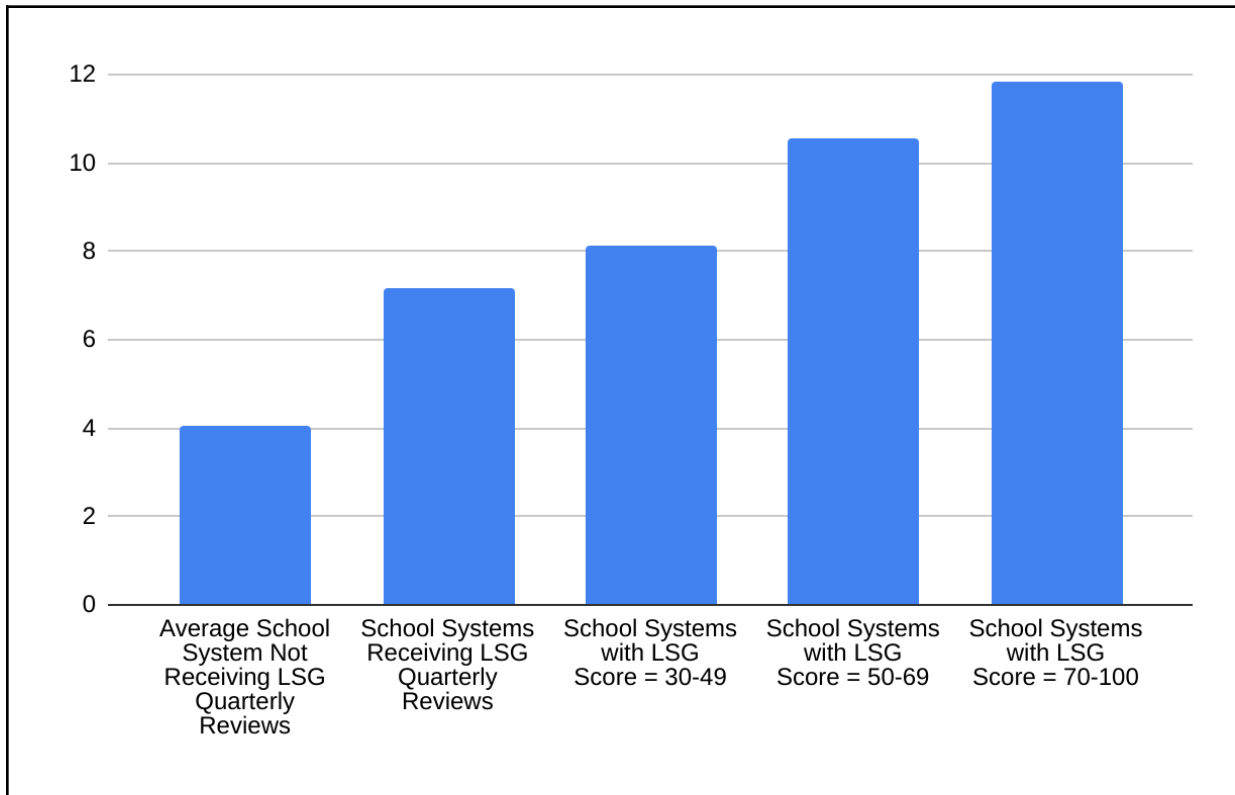
Does Not Meet Focus	0	Preparing To Focus	1	Approaches Focus	4	Meets Focus	12	Masters Focus	15
<i>The board does not meet focus if any of the following statements are true:</i>		<i>The board is preparing to focus if all the following conditions are true:</i>		<i>The board approaches focus if all prior conditions and the following conditions are true:</i>		<i>The board meets focus if all prior conditions and the following conditions are true:</i>		<i>The board masters focus if all prior conditions and the following conditions are true:</i>	
<p>The Board does not have a <b>vision</b>.</p> <p>The Board does not have <b>goals</b>.</p> <p>The Board does not consistently distinguish between <b>inputs, outputs, and outcomes</b>.</p>		<p>The Board has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> adopted a vision statement;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> owned the vision development process while working collaboratively with the Superintendent;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> adopted 3 to 5 goals; and</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> owned the goal development process while working collaboratively with the Superintendent.</li> </ul>		<p>All goals are specific, quantifiable, <b>student outcome goals</b> that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> a <b>population</b>;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> a 5-year <b>deadline</b> of a month and year;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> a <b>baseline</b>; and</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>annual student group targets</b>.</li> </ul>		<p>All Board Members and the Superintendent agree that the student outcome goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> will challenge the organization;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> require adult behavior change;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> are <b>influenceable</b> by the Superintendent; and</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> are the Superintendents first priority for resource allocation.</li> </ul> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The Board relied on a root cause analysis, comprehensive student needs assessment, and/or similar research-based tool to inform the identification of and prioritization of all student outcome goals.</p>		<p>All Board Members and the Superintendent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have committed the vision and student outcome goals to memory;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> know the current status of each student outcome goal; and</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> agree there is broad community ownership of the Board's vision and student outcome goals through involvement and communication with students, staff, and community members.</li> </ul>	

As LSG coaches led school boards through the two-year long coaching cycle, they would support the school boards in conducting quarterly self-evaluations. Figure 3 documents the average school system improvement based on the school board's LSG self-evaluation scores.



**Figure 3**

*TEA 2019 Statewide Average Accountability System Score Increase, Self-Evaluation Rating (TEA, 2019)*



*Note.* Source from Texas Education Agency (2019).

While preliminary, early indications suggest that, even though the magnitude cannot yet be ascertained longitudinally, training in student outcomes focused methodologies followed by intensive coaching over time seems to aid a school systems' efforts to improve student outcomes.

### **Summary**

School boards can create the conditions for improving student outcomes and there are examples across the nation of where this is occurring. But it requires changes in knowledge, skill, and mindset on the part of individual board members. And those shifts appear to be most likely when there is student outcomes focused training followed by student outcomes focused coaching.

### **Conclusion**

It is hard to consider the five practices -- 1) aligning focus on student outcomes, 2) setting goals focused on student outcomes, 3) monitoring progress toward those goals, 4) aligning adult behaviors with the goals, and

5) receiving coaching to support all of the above -- and avoid the conclusion that there is not a sufficiently systematic approach nationwide to ensuring that school board leaders are set up to succeed. Instead, it appears the exact opposite: the support that school board leaders most need is not coming from the sources that they most rely on. And the behaviors that are common practice, absent a student outcomes focused framework and deep coaching, are generally misaligned with creating the context for improving student outcomes.

However, there is still cause for optimism that changing the behavior of adults that serve on school boards can lead to improved outcomes for students. School board leaders are in a meaningful position to create the context for improved student outcomes, but there are specific factors that can increase their likelihood of doing so. Drawing on the wisdom garnered from a variety of disciplines beyond public education -- such as corporate management, non-profit leadership, performance coaching, and public administration -- school board leaders who want to maximize their effectiveness can:

- Identify gaps between belief and action -- as exemplified by the gap between the perception of a student outcomes focus and the reality of an adult inputs focus -- and then act to diminish those gaps
- Set goals about student outcomes and then monitor progress with interim goals about student outputs
- Avoid trainings that are adult inputs focused, even if they claim to be student outcomes focused
- Encourage state and regional entities to adopt board professional development expectations, and related legislation, that reflect a student outcomes focus
- Hire a coach to support the school board and board members on their path to being more fully student outcomes focused

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