

Effective School Board Member Characteristics

Research findings on school board effectiveness can be applied to individual board member characteristics and beliefs. More specifically, studies give us a clue as to the individual characteristics that are seen in stable and more effective school boards. The point of importance is that more stable school boards with less turnover, experience less superintendent turnover, more stable principals and teachers, and higher student performance. While change is sometimes needed to improve a board, frequent turnover and contentious relations among board members are counter-productive. The following table lists the board member characteristic, a brief description, the preferred (stabilizing) disposition, and a practical description.

Board Member Characteristic	Brief Description	Stabilizing Characteristic	Practical Description
1. Understands Role Boundaries	Understands the difference between the role of oversight and micromanagement .	Oversight with knowledgeable critique and advocacy.	If confronted by a parent in the store, the board member can explain school needs, applied interventions, and current success data. Avoids generalities or playing the role of cheerleader or critic.
2. Trustee vs. Delegate	A trustee speaks for themselves and assumes a personal mandate due to their election. A delegate speaks for all stakeholders and maintains constant, open communication with a broad constituency.	Trustee With the ability to shift to Delegate in times of chaos	The board member seeks out input from multiple and varied stakeholders and seeks open dialogue. However, when conflict arises, the board member has the wisdom to maintain order by discouraging contentious communication tactics.
3. Interest- vs. Position-Driven	A position is often polarizing and identifies "friends" and "enemies". An interest is often hidden and needs to be discovered. Often one solution can satisfy multiple interests.	Interest-Driven	The board member avoids declaring allegiance to named organizations or ideologies, but seeks to understand multiple and conflicting interests of all constituents and seeks a solution that can satisfy multiple interests.
4. Broad Student Concern	A stated responsibility to insure all students are afforded social justice . Avoids focused justice for single categories of students or needs.	Social justice for all students	The board member avoids focusing only on a narrow agenda of student issues and needs. Board member avoids focusing only on particular student demographic groups and issues.
5. Contextually Minded	The understanding that the local school district, and each school has unique and shifting needs ; often requiring non-standard solutions .	Recognizes Contextual Need Supports Creative, Non-standard Solutions	The board member avoids reacting to national education issues and focuses on identifying local needs. The board member avoids promoting standardized solutions and prefers to design a solution to fit the unique need of each school as supported by data evidence.
6. Understands Visibility & Influence	The board member understands they possess no individual authority . Power rests in the board as a group only.	School board entity influence	The board member avoids communicating directives or interests to individual school district employees. Visits to schools are unobtrusive, informational, and as part of established