

Majority may rule when it comes to a board vote, but the minority matters too. Casting a sincere vote on a topic is imperative. But once the vote is over, effective boards move forward together. If you find yourself on the opposing side of colleagues, control your emotions, speak to the issue, and explain why you plan to vote no. Listen to colleagues' perspectives. See if what's shared changes your mind. Once the vote is cast, win or lose, embrace the decision. In the public's eye, the true success of a board is measured more by how the group disagrees than how it agrees.



Whether you have one meeting a month or two, processing all the information can be likened to drinking from a fire hydrant. Yet, coming to meetings prepared for discussions is essential. The appearance that some members did their homework and others did not can be a cause of public disappointment and resentment among colleagues. After all, everyone is busy. If you find yourself short on reading time before a meeting, consider four "hip pocket" questions to make on-the-spot decisions: What's the goal of this item or initiative? How does it align with our mission and vision? Has a cost-benefit analysis been done? How would we explain this to a parent?



The *American School Board Journal* gives great advice for maintaining positive collegial relationships. Consider three nuggets from fellow Board members that can apply anywhere in any situation: 1) Be positive, know your limits, and listen. 2) As an individual trustee, you will personally not make a difference. But as a team, you will. 3) Be aware that school board meetings are not necessarily the place where the best suggestions get made or the best work is done.

1. Which of the six uplifting principles is a "signature practice" in your district? What commitments and actions have you taken as a board that make this practice so inspiring?
2. Think about a recent change or new initiative in your district where the board may have pushed when it should have pulled—or vice versa. What has the board done to regroup?
3. How do these uplifting leadership practices align with your governance standards? Are there any revisions to these standards you should consider as a board?



Uplifting leaders make sure that when they're hitting the target, they're not missing the point.

—Andy Heargraves, et al.



Why You Need to Be an Uplifting Board

Feature:



Try This:

Board Colleague Relationships

How to raise up your district to do better

Every school board wants its organization to soar. But what conditions make one district perform better than another? What board actions can turn losses into gains? How do effective boards use their influence to sustain long-term change? According to thought leader Andy Hargreaves and his colleagues from Boston College, the answers boil down to two words: *Uplifting leadership*. Uplifting leadership occurs when board members work together to create something bigger than themselves.

There are two reasons to become an uplifting board. First, uplifting boards give employees hope. They use trust and encouragement to inspire action. When they build up their people, their people do more. Second, the alternative—depressing leadership—is unthinkable. A depressing board toils in negativity. It focuses on failure and blame over success. In districts where depressing leadership holds sway, innovation is sporadic and risk taking nonexistent.

Uplifting school boards see innovation as a people-driven function.

Uplifting school boards see innovation as a people-driven function, not a policy-driven function. Their work is grounded in six defining practices. The first practice is **dreaming with determination**. School boards that govern well dream big. However, they don't just talk about their dreams. They collaborate with the superintendent and staff to turn dreams into reality. Inside expertise is used to connect the future to the past. Cultural and historical assets serve as navigational tools to map out new destinations.

The second practice of an uplifting board is the application of **counterintuitive thinking**. They get out of the water and walk upstream instead of trying to swim upstream. They value creative decision

making, which allows employees to exceed expectations. By combining innovation with relentless discipline, uplifting school boards amplify creativity throughout their organization. For example, rather than rush to try a new idea in every school, they may try it in one or two schools. Principals and teachers are willing to risk going against the flow because their board invites (and trusts) them to forge their own path.

The third practice of an uplifting board is bridging **collaboration with competition**. In any field, it's natural to want to do better than your contemporaries. However, uplifting boards love it when staff members give away their best ideas. When alliances are formed with disparate partners, a platform for collective action is created. Think of tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams. Although their rivalry is fierce, these sisters are extremely close. Together, they have won 13 Grand Slam doubles titles, 3 Olympic gold medals, and 21 titles playing on the same team. Their "collaborate and compete" legacy is a prime time goldmine.

Pushing and pulling feels more like a nudge and tug than a shove and yank.

The fourth practice is **pushing and pulling** to initiate change. To serve local needs, sometimes the board must allocate resources or adopt programs to meet expected demands. That's pulling. Other times the board must standardize or impose approaches as a matter of survival. That's pushing. When change is seen as an opportunity and people share a vested interest in the change, pulling will get things in motion. When people are unwilling to change or believe "this too shall pass," pushing may be required. There are advantages to both, depending on the context and direction the board wants to go. We must be mindful that these actions should feel more like a nudge and tug than a shove and yank.

The fifth uplifting force is using **metrics with meaning**. Rather than try to measure everything, uplifting boards measure those things on which they place a high value in helping students learn. They keep a balanced score card to examine progress. They look for incremental improvements from year

to year, as opposed to colossal gains. A wide range of indicators are used to assess learning, including instructional rounds, teacher feedback, self-evaluation, student work, common assessments, engagement levels, and test data. Shared targets allow for school and grade-level comparisons. The board relies on professional judgment, not political pressure or hasty decisions, to give metrics their meaning

The sixth uplifting practice is **sustainable success**. Progress is rarely swift. Turnaround companies don't turnaround overnight. Nor do they run "hurry up" campaigns. Uplifting boards recognize that busyness is not a substitute for growth. If teachers and principals are worked to the point of exhaustion, school improvement will be hit and miss. To avoid fatigue, uplifting boards adopt a few high-leverage, focused goals each year. You'll hear uplifting boards sometimes say "no thank you" to seemingly big opportunities and selectively say "yes please" to others.

The successful board knows that countries are admired for creativity and persistence at achieving academic goals.

The successful board is aware that for nearly two decades, policymakers have feverishly pushed schools to race to the top—and admonished schools not to leave children behind. However, uplifting boards know that neither racing nor admonishing will raise up their organization. There's no simple answer to increase graduation rates. There's no silver bullet to improve literacy—or easy way to erase inequity.

The countries we admire for their "out of nowhere" academic gains—Finland, Singapore, and Canada—got there through creativity and persistence. They transformed the hopes and thinking of the educators who serve students by creating something bigger than themselves. Try it—it works.


Suzette Lovely

