

# the Key Work of School Boards



# Guidebook

National School Boards Association

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FOR STUDENT  
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# The Key Work of School Boards Guidebook

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword .....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1 Systems Thinking .....	3
Chapter 2 Vision .....	9
Chapter 3 Standards .....	17
Chapter 4 Assessment .....	25
Chapter 5 Accountability .....	35
Chapter 6 Alignment .....	45
Chapter 7 Climate .....	55
Chapter 8 Collaboration .....	67
Chapter 9 Continuous Improvement .....	79
Bibliograph .....	89
About the Authors .....	91
Acknowledgments .....	93

# Foreword

These are challenging times for public education, and even more challenging is the work of local school board members. Today's local board of education is the leader on the front lines of public education. The board is responsible for putting in place the proper keystones for students to learn and achieve at the highest level possible. Board members' primary agenda is raising student achievement and engaging the community to attain that goal.

In an effort to help local school boards best fulfill their role, the National School Boards Association has created the Key Work of School Boards, a framework for raising student achievement through community engagement. It is designed to give school boards concrete action tools to help them be effective in their role as community leaders. The framework is based on the premise that excellence in the classroom begins with excellence in the boardroom.

This guidebook provides information for understanding and implementing the Key Work of School Boards. It is intended as a support to help school boards understand and achieve the essential elements of their work. The guidebook provides a framework of eight "key" action areas that successful boards have focused their attention on: vision, standards, assessment, accountability, resource alignment, climate, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

NSBA is proud of the work school boards do and the role they play in creating the quality public education system that is fundamental to a strong democratic society. We offer this guidebook as a resource to help boards of education carry out their responsibilities for creating equity and excellence in public education and for leading the community in preparing all students to succeed in a rapidly changing global society.



Anne L. Bryant  
Executive Director

# Introduction

Being an effective member of a board of education has always been a challenge, but never more so than today. The Information Age has created demands for instant responsiveness and increased accountability in all facets of society. Nowhere is that increased accountability more acute than in public education.

Improving student achievement through community engagement is the Key Work of School Boards. What can board members do to ensure that their schools meet the demands for increased student achievement? How do they tackle this key work? What are the key elements of this work? What are the actions boards need to take?

This guidebook is intended as a support for school boards to focus their efforts on understanding and achieving the elements of their key work. It speaks to you as a board member and is designed to be user friendly. You can begin at the beginning and read through in sequence or select a different path through the elements depending on your local district's strengths and

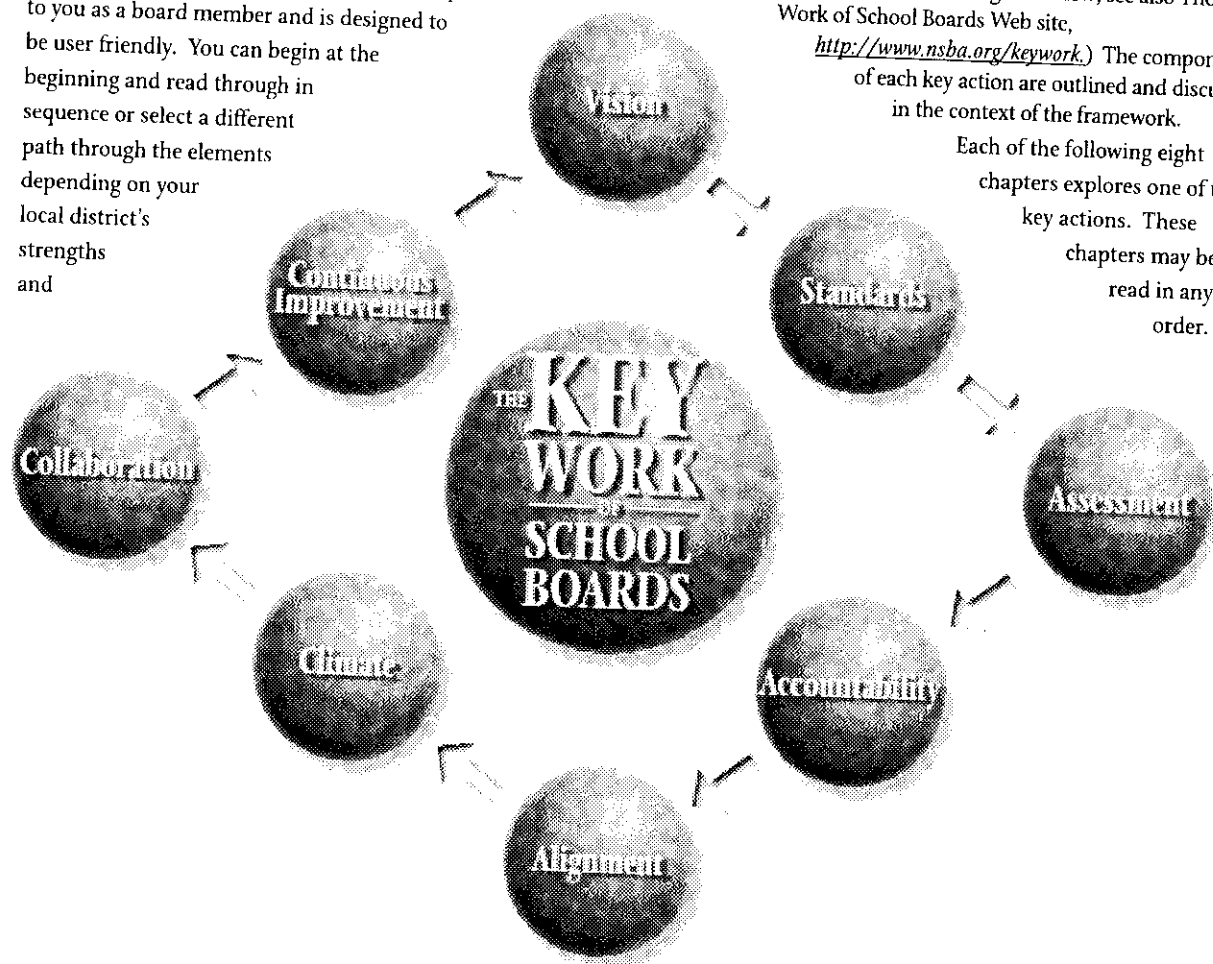
focus. The guidebook follows a framework of eight "key" action areas that successful boards have all paid attention to. The framework is not a sequence, but it is a system—all of the areas should be addressed by a school district committed to high-quality schools with student achievement as its primary focus.

Chapter 1 briefly discusses the concept of systems thinking as a framework for organizational thinking and learning. Board members with experience in the corporate world may already understand that framework and wish to move directly into the "key actions" chapters (chapters 2-9). Others will find this chapter a good introduction to the principles of systems thinking. Chapter 1 also provides an overview of the key work of improving student achievement. This work focuses on eight key actions:

**Vision, Standards, Assessment, Accountability, Resource Alignment, Climate, Collaboration, and Continuous Improvement.** (See the diagram below; see also The Key Work of School Boards Web site,

<http://www.nsba.org/keywork>.) The components of each key action are outlined and discussed in the context of the framework.

Each of the following eight chapters explores one of the key actions. These chapters may be read in any order.



They are intended to help you as a board member understand each key work area and decide on actions and resources most needed in your own district. The format for each key action chapter is the same in order to simplify use of the guidebook. Each chapter includes the following:

- ▶ A definition and explanation of the key action itself as an element of the key work.
- ▶ A self-assessment that allows you to gauge your initial understanding and the current level of readiness of your board in that element of the key work.
- ▶ A list of questions that members of the school board should be asking themselves, as well as questions for the superintendent and staff.
- ▶ An outline differentiating roles and responsibilities of board members and the superintendent.
- ▶ A series of considerations that a school district planning team should take into account as it develops a plan for action.
- ▶ An annotated listing of references for additional or more detailed information on that particular key action. These references include Internet links.
- ▶ A case study that illustrates what effective school boards can do to accomplish the key action.

This guidebook is not intended to be the single answer to the complexities that face boards of education as they confront the challenges to improving student achievement. Nor is the

range of all the possible answers contained in this book. The answers will be as unique as each school district or as each school within the district. You will create many of your own definitions as you refine your learning process. And your state school boards association certainly has training opportunities and materials that can help you address issues unique to your state or community. Through your state school boards association and NSBA's online Resource Exchange Network (<http://www.nsba.org/federation/xchange.html>), every board member has access to useful questions, practical strategies, and resources for implementing the key work. Rely on these local experts to help you sharpen your focus and develop your specific plans.

The purpose of this guidebook is to get you started and to help you develop whatever level of the learning process you find meaningful. Consider this your "Cliffs Notes" rather than the complete textbook. Make it your personal handbook. Write in it. Refer to it whenever you are tackling the challenges of improving student achievement. Monitor your effectiveness by comparing your actions to the actions of other districts. Use the resources to share successes as well as mistakes with other boards of education. Pick it up and put it down. React to it and reflect upon it. Most importantly, understand that this guidebook is for you, to keep you focused on your role in the key work of school boards: improving student achievement.