GOOD GOVERNANCE + eBOARD = EXCELLENCE

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Over the past 17 years of service as an elected member of a local board and an appointed member of a state board of education, I have had the good fortune to have been mentored and coached by strong leaders within my state and national associations – Gary Ashley and Sis Henry at GSBA and Brenda Welburn at the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). These leaders have clearly understood and articulated the simple, but powerful, message that the work we do on our boards of education is about one thing and one thing only – good governance. The purpose of this article is to, first, affirm that GSBA has it right in its approach to what matters most in our desire for improved student learning within public education – good governance; and second, that a quality driven development and deployment of technology system serves to guide that mission.

GSBA's mission is "to ensure excellence in the governance of local school systems..." GSBA leadership and staff work in a consistent manner to bring context to the term "governance of local school systems" such that individual members of local boards understand their legal, ethical and practical role as a member of a board. In addition, efforts are made to familiarize board members with the roles of superintendent, central office, principals and teachers as the professional staff engaged in the delivery of student learning. Workshops and continuing training opportunities are offered on a regular basis for members and whole boards to sharpen their skills and to better understand governance issues. GSBA

and the Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA) work together to underscore the need for collaborative models of leadership that respect the interdependent board/superintendent relationship.

Why is it important to Georgia that school boards and superintendents work together as teams? Research and data tell us that boards and superintendents that model best practices in governance promote higher achievement with a more focused delivery of the limited resources available to the district they serve. As proper roles are delineated, understood and practiced, the district moves management from non-compliance of standards to compliance and then to performance. In an environment that includes limited resources and a daily onslaught of negative media regarding public education, I would suggest that continual improvement models cannot be implemented quickly enough within Georgia's 180 local districts.

Why is the evidence of high functioning boards uneven across the Georgia and the country? My experience as a board member would suggest that the answer to that question is a matter of intent. No longer is it possible, if indeed it ever was, to blame one's failure to understand his or her role as a board member or superintendent upon access to professional development. As stated above, both GSBA and GSSA have worked diligently to ensure that the appropriate training and support is available to each and every one of Georgia's board members and superintendents. That availability has also been extended to members of our state board. Likewise, the failure to function at high levels is not based upon an unrealistic standard of perfection or unachievable expectations. Rather, the failure to reach that high level of functionality is a result of a consistent pattern of acting outside of prescribed boundaries – either equipped with sound data or without. Often that intent is latent or benevolent – a board member whose heart and mind may have the best interest of the student but whose action clearly strays beyond the authority granted to him or her. It can grow out of an impatience surrounding a lack of measurable gains in student achievement, a desire to respond to the member's voter constituency when that response is counter to sound educational or business practice, or can be the result of a board member viewing the position of local board members as a stepping stone to a "more powerful" elected office. Whether

benign or malignant, that consistent pattern of undermining support for the proper roles of the team erodes the trust that must exist to accomplish the very hard work of public education.

It is into that wide continuum of performance that one must consider the effectiveness of a quality driven development and deployment of technology systems such as GSBA's eBOARD, and the related policy and law modules. As a user of eBOARD technology from its earliest days – first as a GSBA board member, then a DeKalb County Board of Education member, and a state board of education member, I offer my comments with an admitted bias toward the work of GSBA.

The lessons learned by me are: first, technology serves only to complement the fundamentals of good governance; second, technology has the very real potential to overload the user with an avalanche of information; and, three, technology will exacerbate that gap between boards who function at a high level and those who do not.

First, the use of technology has never been held up by GSBA as a substitute for excellence in governance. Technology like GSBA's does not diminish the need for a board member or a superintendent to understand his or her role and use discernment and judgment in matters before the board. The technology may assist the individual in organizing and gathering and sorting data, but there exists a foundational need to interpret and apply that information.

Second, there is a great deal of discussion over the role of information in our educational systems today. Some argue that we are still an information society in which the focus is more heavily slanted toward the accumulation of information with the notion that the more information one collects and possesses, the greater one's authority and control. To be relevant and productive in a knowledge economy no longer means who can find the data most quickly, but rather who can use the rich data available and judge its quality and usefulness in public education. Failure to work effectively in a governance system designed for teams almost guarantees that the user of information will be overwhelmed by it.

Finally, for those districts that have good governance practices in place, the introduction of information in a transparent fashion will allow each member of that team to contribute to the effectiveness and economy of the decisions to be made. Issues of quality and judgment will not rest upon a single decision-maker but multiple decision-makers who bring their

experiences and knowledge to the table.

Stephen Covey reminds us that UCLA coaching legend John Wooden always told his teams to "remember that the main thing to remember is that the main thing is the main thing." As we embrace the use of technology in our work as individual board members and boards, we should applaud the efforts of GSBA's leadership team in understanding that "ensuring excellence in the governance of local school systems" is the main thing to remember.