



Education reform supporting messages and data

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School boards are focused on the right issues and reforms.

- An urgent need to dramatically boost achievement is cited as a top concern by nearly two-thirds of school board members. Board members also cite closing achievement gaps, quality teaching and quality leadership as top concerns, along with funding.
- While concerned about achievement, board members also want students to be ready for life beyond high school. They report that preparing “students for a satisfying and productive life” and “fulfilling their potential” are the most important objectives for K-12 schools, more so than preparing students for college or the workforce.
- Local school boards, working with their state legislatures, need greater overall flexibility to make educationally sound decisions that achieve improved academic performance.

NSBA and state school boards associations are doing great work to help local school leaders raise student achievement despite extremely challenging circumstances.

- Improving student achievement has been and continues to be OSBA’s primary focus. This continues with statewide legislative and legal advocacy work at the federal level with NSBA.
- The NSBA Center for Public Education is actively working with state school boards associations to put the lessons of research into local policy and practice by creating tools for school boards to use data effectively in their decision making, and engaging school board leadership in support of high-quality pre-kindergarten.
 - In 2007, OSBA participated in a grant program sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The purpose of the two-year initiative was to inform local school board members, state policymakers and the general public about the short- and long-term benefits of high-quality pre-K education.
- Ohio’s school boards are launching aggressive statewide campaigns to make our schools stronger and more efficient and to inform and engage the public in shaping state and federal policy.
 - School board members and OSBA staff members routinely meet with the governor’s office and the Ohio Department of Education staff to discuss issues impacting school districts.
 - OSBA has launched a public awareness campaign, beginning with the “Ohio Public Schools Speak” video to promote the great things happening in public schools. The video, available at www.ohioschoolboards.org/ohio-public-schools-speak, features school board members, principals, teachers, superintendents and students plus a coach, a treasurer, a food service supervisor and a bus driver. Each tells a story of the value of public education.

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Drastic cutbacks in funding jeopardize the progress that has been made.

- Despite federal stimulus dollars, significant declines in local and state revenues forced most Ohio school districts to cut their budgets for the 2010-11 school year. Local property tax revenues are expected to decline further in 2011 and 2012 and state funding is unlikely to rebound until late in the decade.
- School districts have been forced to:
 - Cut staff and increase class size
 - Slash professional development for teachers and staff
 - Eliminate extracurricular activities, field trips, and elective courses
 - Close underused schools
 - Implement salary freezes and reduce health and retirement benefits
- Programs that research has shown work, such as pre-K education and dropout prevention, also are facing the budget axe.
- Ohio districts have limited flexibility and little if any fat left to cut due to increased number of state and federal mandates, as well as the rising expenses for health care and pension benefits and costs such as utilities that are growing faster than inflation.
- Once the recession is over, districts should not expect to get back to pre-recession funding levels unless there is a real change in how schools are funded at the local, state, and federal levels.
- While the federal stimulus dollars have greatly helped school districts avoid even more drastic cuts, funding is expected to run out following the 2011 school year. Meanwhile, federal funding levels for Title I and IDEA remain significantly below the amounts authorized and promised for both programs, and much of the additional funding approved by Congress is for competitive grants - not core services.

Despite challenges, dramatic improvements ARE occurring in K-12 schools.

- According to the Nation's Report Card - the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) - U.S. fourth and eighth graders posted steady and significant gains in reading from 1992 to 2007. U.S. students have also improved steadily on math and science assessments. This year, gains in reading for elementary students on NAEP stalled for the first time in a decade, indicating more work is needed.
 - Ohio's public education system has improved for the third year in a row, rising to No. 5 in the nation. It is the state's best showing ever in *Education Week's* widely respected annual "Quality Counts" report. Ohio ranked seventh in 2008 and sixth in 2009. Maryland placed first for 2010, with a B+; the majority of states received grades of C or lower. The theme of the "Quality Counts 2010" report was the push for common standards and assessments. The report, which studies a broad range of state policies for improving public education, is available at <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/96124>.
 - State assessments, while difficult to compare, indicate that achievement gaps may be narrowing and that urban student performance, while still lagging their more affluent suburban counterparts, is improving.
 - Overall, support for public schools remains strong in large portions of the nation, with most parents (77 percent) giving their kids' schools an A or B on the latest Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup poll.
- We know the keys for success, and they start with strong local leadership.**
- Research shows that the building blocks for successful schools are a culture of high expectations and caring for students; safety and discipline; administrators who are instructional leaders; hard-working, committed and able teachers supported by great professional development and time to work together; a curriculum focused on academic achievement that emphasizes basic skills; increased instructional time; parents as partners in learning.
 - Research compiled by NSBA's Center for Public Education shows that effective school boards and superintendents create a shared vision of high standards with teachers, parents, students, business leaders and community members.

- Effective boards focus on policy, not administration, and drive districtwide alignment of systems and resources. These boards use data to monitor and evaluate progress, ensure resources are allocated where they can make the most difference, and constantly strive to improve instruction and learning for every child.
- High-impact school boards also have a trusting, collaborative relationship with the superintendent and fellow board members. Better relationships, in turn, help create more stable conditions for consistent school and district leadership.

Sources: NSBA's Center for Public Education (www.centerforpubliceducation.org); Office of Advocacy and Issues Management (www.nsba.org/advocacy); and soon-to-be-published national survey of school boards.