

## Learning from the Lighthouse Research

### The School Board's Role in Student Achievement

In 2000, the Iowa Association of School Boards was charged with the role of defining the school board's role in student achievement. That charge was moved both by the requests from school board members who cared about improving results for students, and by the critics of school boards who questioned whether a board could make a difference – and in some cases, whether school boards were detrimental to education today.

The focus was: Are school boards in high-achieving districts different from those in low-achieving districts? And, if so, how? "The study became one of the first and only studies that made a credible, research-based connection between the work of the school board and levels of student achievement." As a result of Lighthouse Study #1 (1998-2000) and Lighthouse Study #2 (2002-2007) we know that:

**Board members** in high-achieving districts often referred to student needs – as shown through data about students and groups of students – as the focus for decision-making. Board members could talk about data on the dropout rate, test scores and student needs. They talked about receiving information on a routine basis, such as monthly reports.

Board members in **low-achieving districts** referred to data used in decisions based on anecdotal and personal experiences. Data on student achievement was received as a report to the board, but rarely linked to a decision. The board members talked very generally about the test scores and relied on the interpretation made by the superintendent.

**School board/superintendent** teams that commit to improving achievement create accountability of the school system and staff. There is accountability for improvement because it is the right thing to do for students and, requires a need for increased measurement and analysis. Accountability is positive, as it is necessary to cause change.

### Board Leadership Responsibilities

The Lighthouse Research studies frame six principal leadership roles of the board related to improving student learning and achievement, as well as the appropriate action within the parameters of the board's governance role.

I. Leadership – A focus on student learning through a shared and clear vision, high expectations, and dynamic leadership at all levels.

II. Analysis of Assessment Data – Utilize data and information relative to student needs to ensure informed decision-making and modifications as necessary to meet the needs of the district and building level.

III. Supportive Climate/Culture – Provide a supportive work environment and culture that enables staff to succeed in their roles.

IV. Monitor progress/success – Continuous focus on improving education with high levels of involvement and shared decision-making.

V. Engage Community – Connection between the school district, parents, and community members.

VI. Shared Leadership - Establish board learning time, learn together, communicate, develop a willingness and readiness to lead and allow others to lead, and build commitment to the focus through shared information and discussion.