A sense of direction is critical to all involved in determining competencies for school board training programs.

School Boards: Coming of Age

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School boards have come of age, and it appears that they are currently facing a mid-life crisis. Because educational reform has indeed arrived, decisions made by state and local board members today are certain to impact schools and schooling for years to come.

Mid-life crisis in individuals is associated with a time of self-evaluation and assessment. It comes after a period of years and involves a realization of one's worth and one's mortality. School boards as entities and school board members as individuals are finding themselves involved in complex and demanding positions. They, too, must re-examine their roles in the light of existing priorities in order to gain information, make wise decisions, and function in ways that improve quality in education and survival in their positions. While boards, past and present, have traditionally been guardians of accountability, it may now be time that they assess their own skills and needs in view of increased demands from public and legislative climates.

Historically, local boards of education have concerned themselves with matters related to goals, policies, finances, community relations, personnel decisions, negotiations and the writing of local policies and procedures. The following topics are representative of those often addressed by school boards: energy conservation, declining enrollments, school calendar, discipline, transportation, immunization, school construction, debt limitations, insurance, teacher evaluation, and employee complaints. But the demands of the '80s upon school board members have increased in both quantity and complexity. Need for an information base, necessary in decision making, is intensified by a multiplicity of programs spanning early childhood through adult education and addressing needs on a learner continuum of disability through gifted.

For example, each district in Texas will need to document basic financial state allotments annually through a process that: (1) stipulates average daily attendance exclusive of full-time equivalent students in special education and vocational education progress and (2) is adjusted by a price differential index as well as a small district adjustment, where applicable. Such a task demands financial and

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mathematical skills that may be beyond the training level of most board members.

A recent state mandate (Texas House Bill 72) has required that school board members be trained. Due to the kinds of legislation currently being enacted, one might also ask whether such a training program should concentrate more on curricular areas than it has in the past.

Steller (1985) suggested that school board members use board policies to set the direction for effective instructional management. The role of board members in determining policies related to curriculum systems, supervisory and evaluation systems was discussed. The content of this article acknowledges that board members need to be well versed in curricular matters.

The National School Board Association (NSBA) also published a guide, **Becoming a Better Board Member** (1982), that served as a manual with the primary objective of condensing the amount of time board members need to become effective school leaders, as well as providing information designed to be helpful to experienced board members. Curriculum was included as one of the areas in addition to traditional roles.

The California School Boards Association (1981) acknowledges that evaluation of school instructional progress and curriculum is a school board responsibility.

School board members determine and implement far reaching changes. Board members are now framing the direction of curriculum reforms for years to come. Given this new emphasis upon board members' impact upon curriculum, one might examine the new areas in which board members need to become knowledgeable in order to function in today's educational arena and in arenas of the future.

Ron Brandt in "On Education and the Future: A Conversation with Harold Shane" considered the need for educating for a new millennium. In that article, Shane noted that education for the future must consider the body of knowledge essential for survival. He also commented upon the common views of scientists that he had interviewed regarding education for the future; he concluded that there was an "amazing tendency" for those persons to be able to draw upon one another's disciplines. He said that the "interdisciplinary tone was conspicuous." Shane's main concern and that of the people he interviewed, was whether or not human beings could cope fast enough to deal with the changes and problems that threaten them.

Consistent with Shane and Brandt's conversation regarding the need for educating for a new millennium, the authors of this article investigated the training programs needed for board members—the educational leaders for a new millennium.

The authors polled members of higher education, public school administration, and local and state board members to determine major categories to be included in a survey designed to determine priorities for school board training programs. Participants were asked to indicate three priority areas for school board member training programs.

The following areas emerged from a compilation of participant responses:

1. Processes That Crosscut Learning

How can one determine which processes contribute to analytical thinking? What are the processes that crosscut all of learning? As Shane pointed out, the scientists he interviewed had amazing abilities to draw upon one another's disciplines. Science processes such as observing, patterning, inferring, predicting, classifying and integrated processes apply in all content areas. Board members with a background in "sciencing" could do much to ensure the in-

tegration of content, as opposed to fragmentation of curricular areas.

2. Tests and Measurements

More and more board members are requiring and implementing systemwide testing programs. There is a body of knowledge from the area of tests and measurements as well as statistics that would be valuable to board members as they deal with evaluation and interpretation of test results.

3. Learning/Teaching Theory

Much is known about how people learn and about some of the factors related to "good teaching." This would constitute required reading/instruction for a board member.

4. Development Stages

Not all learners progress at the same rate, but there is some information about what one might expect of learners at various stages of development.

5. Reading Education

Reading education is a lifelong process and certainly knowledge of theories, approaches, strategies, and materials in reading education would rate high on the board members' curriculum awareness report card.

6. Special Learners (Bilingual/Multicultural Education)

Knowledge of special learners' needs and appropriate teaching strategies would affect one's world view in the area of curriculum.

7. Discipline

Theories about discipline are available in abundance. Knowledge of a variety of disciplinary strategies might affect the position one would assume in the area of discipline policy determination.

8. Group Process and Change Theory

Much is known about (a) the stimulation of effective group processes and (b) the motivation of change. This would be relevant information for board members.

9. Technology

Issues surrounding the use of technology and the evaluation of programs are of importance today and in the future. Simplistic views of technology and its impact must be dignified through a more thorough explanation of the options and the tools.

10. "Mathing"

Board members need to be aware of the need to focus upon application, problem-solving strategies in addition to computational processes. The same is true in other curricular areas.

11. Forecasting

Board members with some background in forecasting/ projecting would have an advantage in the area of anticipating future needs.

12. Planning and Budgeting Systems

Some knowledge of planning and budgeting systems would serve a board member well.

The original pool of items was edited and then recirculated to the original contributors for additional revisions. These categories were then used to construct the **Survey of Expected School Board Competencies**. This survey was a forced-choice, paired comparison instrument that consisted of paired statements concerning competencies to be included in a training program for board members. Since every item was compared to every other item, the computer program generated a priority ranking of all items in the pool.

The sample for this study was comprised of 116 educational leaders in the state of Texas. Initially, 210 surveys were mailed to 43 professors from Texas institutions of higher education, and a random sample of 38 local board members, 38 school superintendents, 38 senior high principals, 38 elementary principals, and 15 state board members. Of these, 116 useable responses were returned; this represents a total return rate of 55 percent. The return rate by categories follows:

Local Board Members 31.6%
School Superintendents 5.0%
Senior High Principals 57.9%
Elementary Principals 76.3%
Higher Education 72.0%
State Board Members 20.2%

Table I indicates the rank order for each competency according to the categories of respondents. (Descriptive statistics for the 15 competency areas, including raw scores, p values, z-scores, t-scores, and standard deviations are available upon request.)

Table I
Rankings by Respondent Categories

Item	Local Board N = 12	High School Prin N = 22	Elem Prin N = 29	Higher Educ N = 31	Supt N = 19	State Board N = 3
Planning, programming, and budgeting systems	1	1	1	3	1	3
The research findings about effective teaching and effective schools	2	2	2	1	2	2
Non-teaching duties that impinge upon actual teaching time	9	4	3	2	6	4
Different methods of teacher evaluation	3	7	4	6	3	5
The professional literature regarding the process and implementation of change	6	6	5	5	4	12
The professional literature related to local versus state and federal control (i.e., funding, textbook adoption procedures, etc.)	4	5	6	10	10	7
The professional literature regarding financial equity (e.g., the unique hardships of some small rural districts in meeting state mandates	5	3	7	12	8	10
The professional literature regarding the process of curriculum revision	7	9	8	9	7	15
Their own value system (regarding children, teachers, schools, and the role of the schools in society) as a basis for policy decisions	11	13	11	4	5	1

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Program complexity as related to differences in early childhood, elementary, secondary, special, and adult education	12	8	10	8	9	8
The professional literature regarding current and future educational perspectives (e.g., EDUCATION WEEK, EDUCATION DAILY.)	10	10	9	7	13	11
Aspects of human development as they relate to mental, emotional and social adjustment	15	12	12	11	12	9
Tests and measurement issues and statistics that affect test construction, administration, and interpretation (i.e., the limitations of norm- and criterion-references tests, knowledge of measures of central tendency, etc.)	8	11	13	14	14	14
Applications of the thinking process (i.e., observing, inferring, predicting, and classifying) across content areas and grade levels	13	15	14	13	11	6
Models of the reading process and how a person's philosophical stance affects selection of materials and approaches	14	14	15	15	15	13

For the total sample of 116 respondents, (a) items pertaining to planning programming and budgeting and (b) research findings about effective teaching and effective schools were chosen significantly more than any of the other items. These items had greater than 70 percent chance of being selected by each respondent. The various groups surveyed agreed on many of the items that were selected as being important for board members, yet there were differences across groups in terms of the relative ranking of each.

It is interesting to note that the item reflecting Shane's concern for an interdisciplinary emphasis (applications of the thinking processes) was not given a high ranking by most of the respondents.

In addition to the forced-choice format, respondents were asked to make additional comments regarding identification/evaluation of competencies for school board members. Seventeen people responded to the open-ended portion of the survey.

The following categories were suggested as additional areas that might be included in board training programs: (1) how schools operate, (2) teacher/parent/student relationships, (3) interest in state laws affecting districts, (4) behavior at public meetings and resistance to special interest groups, (5) effective methods of dealing with patrons and public, (6) implementing the majority decision, (7) leadership skills of administrators, (8) problem-solving skills and techniques, (9) human relation skills, (10) policy determination versus administration of policy, (11) awareness of legal responsibilities, (12) knowledge of school finance, (13) skills in policy planning and formulation, (14) knowledge of budget preparation procedures, forms, and budget management, (15) student discipline, (16) information on career ladders, (17) learning disabilities, (18) teacher evaluation, (19) textbook evaluation (process and procedures), (20) gifted and talented, (21) phonics and how it relates to reading, (22) management of food commodities, (23) special education in general (including federal funding/training), (24) communication between different groups, and (25) how to help children learn.

Other general comments suggested that board members should: (1) be able to read and write, (2) be well educated, (3) have children currently in school, (4) be receptive to change, (5) know the duties of policy making, (6) have balanced desires in the area of educational opportunity, (7) know how to delegate authority, (8) hold a college degree, (9) be knowledgeable regarding what a successful business requires, and (10) strive for a balanced educational program.

Although some of these categories duplicate the forced-choice items (in different terms), all suggestions have been included here.

Of the 116 people responding to the survey, nine reacted to the survey itself. Some felt that the survey items were weighted too heavily in curricular and/or philosophical areas. These persons seemed to feel that knowledge of curriculum is more an administrative function than a policy making function. Others commented about the forced-choice format and the necessity of comparing each item to every other item. Some felt that the survey was too long. One person commented that the items on the survey were idealistic; another, that they were esoteric.

The additional categories that were suggested could be included in a revision of the survey. An all-inclusive survey would certainly encounter the same criticisms regarding length of the survey and difficulty of completion. Given the reactions of some to the forced-choice format and the length of the existing format, it might be very difficult to get people to respond to a longer survey. Certainly, however, this survey is a beginning in surfacing what people believe to be important competencies for board members.

The survey also emphasizes the importance of knowledge of curricular matters to informed policy making. Some obviously view these as two distinct functions while others clearly believe knowledge of curriculum to be an essential ingredient in informed policy determinations. While some people proposed literacy (interpreted as being able to read and write), others would define literacy of board members in a much broader sense. Where on a continuum of literacy are we today? And where might we be in the future? The survey results may pose more questions than answers, but it is a beginning.

The goals that are deemed unrealistic and idealistic today could become the goals of the future. Would a national sample produce the same results? And since testing and teaching are two different arenas, competencies that are not very palatable from an assessment stance might be made palatable in a training program.

As we embark on the "yellow brick road," it does matter that we know where we want to go; otherwise, it doesn't matter which fork in the road we take. A sense of direction is critical to all involved. This survey was an initial attempt to

determine some of the competencies deemed necessary for school board training programs. In that sense it has achieved a crucial first step in further defining the components involved in today's schools, the priorities identified in an historic reform era, and the human components necessary to make decisions that will impact the quality of education for students of the present and the future.

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