



This bulletin, produced by TASB Leadership Team Services, examines research and shares philosophies to inform and promote exceptional governance within school boards across Texas.

The Influence of Perspectives on Board Actions

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Your perspectives matter to students in your district. They matter because your perspectives inform and influence your decisions and actions as a trustee and as a board. They matter because your perspectives have this influence whether you are conscious of them or not.

In January, TASB hosted the XG Summit, bringing together national researchers focused on improved school board governance. Harry Heiligenthal from the Iowa Association of School Boards shared results from a multi-year research study called the Iowa Lighthouse Study. A central finding from this research was the difference in perspectives between “stuck” and “moving” districts. That is, the school boards in districts that were improving communicated distinctly different beliefs than the boards in low-performing districts. Harry described this as the difference between “elevating” and “accepting” beliefs.

Board members and educators communicated **elevating** beliefs with comments like, “It’s amazing what kids can do if we ask them to!” and “A family’s level of income is used

as an excuse. Sometimes people say the poor students have limits. I say all kids have limits. I believe we have not reached the limits of any of our kids in the system, including the poor children.” Contrast that with more **accepting** beliefs that were communicated through comments like, “We can’t overlook the need for parents to send better kids to school” and “All children may not be able to learn, but surely everyone can learn to behave.”

Imagine how these different views of students—and the school district’s capacity to respond to student needs—might shape a trustee’s work. Would a trustee likely expect meaningful improvement in student outcomes if he held the perspective that some students just cannot learn? Would a trustee likely support an improved professional development program if she did not believe that improved instruction was an important way to affect student learning? Would a trustee be more likely to adhere to a set of board operating procedures if he valued commitment and respect as his responsibility to the whole board?

Seven individuals typically comprise school boards in Texas—each operating with his or her own set of perspectives, beliefs, and values. What focus could be brought to the board’s work when the seven individuals take time to identify the beliefs they share in common and reflect on how such beliefs should guide the work of the whole board?

The school board in Weatherford ISD (WISD) is such an example. In addition to their board’s mission, the district’s website includes a statement of core beliefs and commitments. For example, one states, “We believe that WISD can achieve higher levels of performance through clearly defined goals that set high expectations for student achievement through continuous improvement.” These publicly stated beliefs also describe how the beliefs guide their work as a board. This type of explicit communication provides the Weatherford community with a clear picture of high expectations for students and educators, but it also communicates the perspectives and commitments of the board of trustees to support those high expectations.