

The Case for Trust in School Board Leadership

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Trust is an imperative ingredient in school board leadership. Trust means that I care about you and that our work together is bigger than me or you. We can address anything that comes before us because our intention isn't to question one's integrity or personally harm one another, but rather it is to share openly in a spirit of collaboration and consensus decision-making.

The ability to share ideas and have genuine conversations is only possible when all participants trust each other.

A common refrain often heard every two years is — “We have a great board, but we don't know what is going to happen through the next election.” An established culture of trust can greatly mitigate the challenges that arise from board turnover. However, a culture of trust does not just happen; it requires intentional work.

David Horsager, bestselling author of *The Trust Edge* and CEO of Trust Edge Leadership Institute, offers a compelling framework for building and maintaining a relationship of trust. He refers to the framework as the 8 Pillars of Trust. They are:

1. **Clarity:** *People trust the clear and mistrust or distrust the ambiguous.* School boards and their organizations need a clear vision and mission and well-stated priorities that guide and align the work of the corporation.

2. **Compassion:** *People put faith in those who care beyond themselves.* The work of each board member is not about what is best for the individual or a given group of people but about the diverse needs of the whole community.

3. **Character:** *People notice those who do what is right ahead of what is easy.* Difficult decisions are difficult to make. They require time and a commitment to consider the input of each board member. Sometimes in board work, it is necessary to make decisions that are the best for the corporation and community even though they are unpopular with some. Making the tough decisions together and standing by those decisions defines an effective board.

4. **Competency:** *People have confidence in those who stay fresh, relevant, and capable.* The Indiana School Boards Association offers, promotes, and encourages lifelong learning and professional development at dozens of events each year, recognizing that the world of public education continues to be ever-changing. As a member of ISBA, be sure to take advantage of these opportunities to grow.

5. **Commitment:** *People believe in those who stand through adversity.* A board's decisions will rarely make everyone happy. Controversies will inevitably occur, but how you respond to those controversies is often even more important than the controversies themselves.

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School Board Member Updates

ISBA is pleased to welcome four new school board members who were recently appointed to fill local vacancies. Congratulations on your selection, and thank you for taking on this important responsibility.

- **Austin Brann**, a regional sales and operations manager for Speedway/7-Eleven, was appointed to the Richmond Community Schools Board of Trustees to complete the nine months remaining in the term of **Brad Walton**, who departed to become the school district's director of facilities.
- **Louise Tallent**, a retired high school teacher, was appointed to the school board of the Lake Central School Corporation. She replaced **Jennifer Medlen**.
- The Lafayette School Corporation appointed **Stephen Bultinck** to the school board following the resignation of **Allison McKay** who moved out of the district. Bultinck previously served on the school board for 15 years.
- The Clinton Prairie School Board approved the appointment of **Kerk Kesler** to the school board to fill the seat that opened with the resignation of **Cindy Neal**.

In Memorium

- Lynn Romas, school board member for the Clay Community Schools, passed away April 6. He was 73.
- Gerald Gauck, president of the Milan Community Schools Board, passed away May 3 at the age of 82.

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6. Connection: *People want to follow, buy from, and be around those who are willing to connect and collaborate.* An important component of any discussion I have about effective board leadership is the ability of a board to lead with their superintendent as a unified team.

7. Contribution: *Few things build trust quicker than actual results.* This is a case for a board's ability to focus on outcomes based on data and evidence. State the goals clearly and trust those in your organization to drive results.

8. Consistency: *It's the little things—done consistently—that make the biggest difference.* I firmly believe that boards that clearly state common expectations for governance and interaction and live by those expectations in everything they do together build a culture that can stand up to change in leadership.

There is more at stake here than the interpersonal relationships of board members. A dominant headline in public education news is the shrinking pool of employees. Lack of adequate staffing is reaching crisis levels in many school systems. School boards can play a major role in retaining staff. According to Horsager's study, The Trust Outlook™, people want leadership they can trust over any other work environment consideration. Developing a strong culture of trust is more than just getting along. The future health of your organization depends on it.