



Supporting Messages and Data

- **Dramatic improvements are needed in public education. Not all schools are where we want them to be and too many students fall between the cracks.**
 - Change is needed because the demands of today's global economy are so much higher than what our public schools were designed to deliver, not because most schools are broken.
 - 21st century skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity and innovation require 21st century schools. Local school boards are committed to changing schools to meet new student needs and today's higher standards for learning.
 - The achievement gap between children of color and children who live in poverty and their more affluent peers is America's most pressing civil rights issue as well a critical education concern. Students with disabilities are also falling between the cracks, and gifted students aren't being pushed as far and as fast as they can go.
 - However, the experiences of the lowest-performing schools can't be easily generalized to all schools. A national reform agenda that strives to apply extreme measures across the board is likely to end up not serving any school well.

- **School boards are focused on the right issues and reforms.**
 - Nine out of 10 boards are concerned that No Child Left Behind Act's overly narrow focus on testing has hurt teaching and learning, according to a forthcoming survey to be published by NSBA, the Iowa School Boards Foundation, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.
 - An urgent need to dramatically boost achievement is cited as a top concern by nearly two-thirds of 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 NSBA's primary focus, starting with the Key Work of School Boards. This continues with legislative and legal advocacy work at the federal level as well as the Center for Public Education (CPE), which conducts original analyses and synthesizes best evidence on policies and practices to improve student achievement and close gaps.
 - 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.
- America'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. For example, working through their state school boards associations:
 - Georgia school boards are providing leadership to create a statewide, shared vision for public education in Georgia that meets world-class standards.
 - California school boards are campaigning against the massive budget cuts that are destroying schools across the state.
 - New York school boards are focusing on aligning the new national core standards with local curricula, advocating for longer school days and school years and effective teacher training.
 - *[Add specific examples of ways school boards in your state are working together, through your state association, to provide positive leadership in public education.]*
 - **More money is not the one-size-fits-all solution to improving schools, but drastic cutbacks in funding jeopardize the progress that has been made.**
 - Despite federal stimulus dollars, significant declines in local and state revenues forced 78 percent of 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 furlough days, freeze salaries, and reduce health and retirement benefits
 - Consider moving to 4-day school weeks.
 - Programs that research has shown work, such as pre-K education and dropout prevention, also are facing the budget axe.
 - In all, 30 states have cut education funding for FY 2010-11, according to a soon to be published report from the Center for Public Education. Arizona eliminated preschool for more than 4,000 children and limited funding to support disadvantaged children in pre-k through 3rd grade. California has reduced K-12 aid to local school districts by billions of dollars, forcing Los Angeles Unified School District to cut 5 days from the school year to avoid the layoff of 2,000 teachers. Georgia furloughed all certified employees and bus drivers for six days, and additional cuts have resulted in schools being shut down, larger class sizes, and layoffs. Michigan cut its FY 2010 school aid budget by \$382 million, resulting in a \$165 per-pupil spending reduction. Massachusetts eliminated pre-k programs and early intervention services to help special-needs children, and New Jersey cut funding for after-school programs, affecting more than 11,000 students. Funding to reduce class size in grades K-3 was eliminated in Virginia.
 - 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.
 - Some states, particularly Massachusetts and Minnesota, perform as well as many of the top nations on the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) study.
 - 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.
 - Urban schools don’t get the credit they deserve, especially in light of all the risk factors their students face that are out of school officials’ control. Urban students, most of whom qualify for federal lunch subsidies, have made significant and important progress in raising student achievement.
 - Urban school boards like North Carolina’s Guilford County Schools (GCS) and Maryland’s Baltimore Public Schools are using incentives, smaller class sizes, additional classroom resources, and differentiated pay structures to recruit high-performing teachers and principals to struggling schools.
 - Public school choice also factors heavily in urban districts like GCS, which had five schools with 100 percent high school graduation rates in 2010. Other urban districts like Denver Public Schools, Houston Independent School District, and Minneapolis Public Schools also use magnet and choice schools to offer smaller learning environments with unique curricula tailored to meet student needs and spark greater student and parent engagement.
- **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 district-wide 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.
- **Innovation, especially in challenging times, is critical.**
 - With demands on public schools growing, innovation is key. Boards and superintendents are creating innovative and successful alternatives to traditional public schools to meet the unique needs of their local communities. Examples include:
 - Early and middle colleges are increasing academic rigor while offering students smaller, more-focused schools.
 - Language immersion programs teach children as young as kindergarten Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, German, and French.
 - Twilight schools give students whose family obligations require them to work during the day the chance to finish high school at night.
 - Computer-based and virtual schools offer 24-hour access to learning, while and technical education programs enable students to earn advanced certifications while still in high school.
 - Traditional, comprehensive high schools are reforming into small, specialized academies to ensure students don't get lost in the shuffle.
 - Gender-specific and academic-only schools with extended hours and days, mandatory Saturday tutorials, enrichment activities in the arts, and other curricula designed to close the achievement gap.
 - Early childhood and literacy-based prekindergarten programs designed to help at-risk and developmentally delayed students start school on par with their more affluent peers.
 - **Just because it's a charter school doesn't mean it's innovative.**
 - We greatly admire the work of Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone and the KIPP Academy schools. School boards nationally are exploring how charters might help spur innovation and improvement, and believe that under the right circumstances, they may have value.

However:

- Overall charter school performance nationwide actually is quite mixed (only 17 percent of charter schools outperform their traditional counterparts). In other words, 83 percent of traditional public schools perform as well or better.
- Research on charter school effectiveness is incomplete and tends to be anecdotal or descriptive rather than evaluative.
- Expanding hours and days of instruction can be difficult and costly to implement across the board, especially with the current budget crisis and a national shortage of teachers and principals skilled in working with high-needs students.
- All schools receiving public funds should meet the same standards of accountability. Charter schools should have to abide by the same environmental, labor, due process, and fiscal laws that public schools must.

- Local school boards should retain the authority to not renew the charter of any school that fails to meet pre-established criteria, especially demonstrated improvements in student achievement.
- Charters often have unique latitude in fundraising and partnerships with the business community, giving them an extra advantage that could prove harmful to traditional public schools, especially in challenging economic times.

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.