

Response to Request for Information

Your Question:

You asked which states have required governance improvement from school boards as part of the larger school improvement process and for examples of governance improvement rubrics used in those states.

Our Response:

As you know, school improvement is largely planned and implemented at the school and district level with few statewide policies beyond setting accountability structures and general consequences for low performance.

ECS's recent overview of [school turnaround strategies](#) highlights the most common school improvement strategies and examples of districts implementing these strategies, as well as the results of some of these strategies. The strategies highlighted in this report include:

- **Innovation zones** - Indiana's Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, Tennessee's Shelby County School District and Metro Nashville Public Schools, and Massachusetts Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership
- **Recovery districts** - Louisiana, Tennessee and Michigan
- **Receiverships** - Massachusetts' Lawrence Public School District

As noted in our report, "successful turnaround efforts depend on a governance structure that is prepared to drive, support or sustain meaningful change. It is critical that a state conduct an evaluation to determine whether the SEA, LEA and boards of education have the capacity to lead turnaround efforts. If the capacity does not exist within those traditional governance structures, policymakers must determine who should fill that role."

State efforts to improve local board governance might include statutory provisions that allow for the ouster of a local board as a means of restructuring or that allow for a large urban district (e.g., Chicago) to have its board ousted and replaced with a board appointed by a mayor or governor. However, these provisions are nearly always associated with school/district interventions.

Research & Reports: Boards & School Improvement

The Board's Role in School Improvement

The Center on School Turnaround at WestEd has highlighted "districts engaged in focused turnaround efforts where their respective boards played a key role in catalyzing, shaping, and supporting targeted improvement efforts."

The Center has produced two case study reports so far:

- [Wichita Public Schools](#) – In this district, the Wichita Board of Education's role in school improvement included:
 - Establishing a healthy board culture
 - Developing a strategic plan
 - Hiring a strong superintendent

- Adopting the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework and institutionalizing MTSS
 - Communicating with the superintendent
 - Differentiating supports for schools
 - Monitoring board practices
- [New Haven Public Schools](#) – In this district, the New Haven Public Schools Board’s role in school improvement included:
 - Providing an increased focus on teaching and learning
 - Implementing revised board committee structures
 - Revising the teachers’ contract
 - Expanding community engagement
 - Establishing a strong relationship with the district superintendent
 - Supporting implementation via policy
 - Enhancing the role of monitoring and acting as critical friends to the district

Training

The Center on School Turnaround has also developed [school board training](#) on school turnaround. The training is designed to take a limited amount of time (20 to 30 minutes once a month). Many states already require general training for school board members like [Texas](#) does. State school boards associations often support this by providing the training to local boards.

Challenges & Recommendations

The report [Moving Beyond the Killer B’s: The Role of School Boards in School Accountability and Transformation](#) identifies the challenges districts face in school improvement and factors impeding board contributions to improvement:

“The challenge facing school districts striving to improve is figuring out how to leverage largely volunteer boards of lay citizens, generally with limited time to devote to board work, to develop coherent and innovative policies in a climate that frequently reduces their role to that of tracking the “killer B’s” (e.g., buildings, buses, books, and budgets).

Factors that impede boards’ substantive contributions include, but are not limited to, politics, a dysfunctional relationship between board members and a superintendent, board member and administrative turnover, lack of knowledge, single-agenda bias, interest-group politics, and financial insecurities.”

Recommendations from *Moving Beyond the Killer B’s* for actions at the state level include:

- Establish a **state-level school board liaison** charged with developing a statewide strategy for building local board capacity.
- Develop baseline **training requirements** for new and experienced school board members focused on process as well as substantive issues critical to establishing conditions for district and school success. These requirements should be coupled with clear **accountability structures** to ensure meaningful implementation.
- Provide experienced board members, and especially board chairpersons, access to high quality, relevant, and timely **leadership training** to ensure it adds value to their practice.
- Maintain a **separate budget line item** for board training to ensure it is preserved, even in difficult financial climates, and leverage the funds to hold training providers accountable for providing relevant and high quality training opportunities. This may include online training options.

- Develop tools to **track and publish board training and capacity building efforts** to inform school board elections. These data could be incorporated into district report cards (e.g., create a board capacity index).
- Create intentional **collaborative training opportunities** between national and state school board associations and their counterpart superintendent associations related to building productive relationships and targeted school change efforts (e.g., school turnaround).
- Create school board member **recruitment pipelines** that introduce community members to board service and provide basic training related to board member responsibilities.
- Incubate executive **education opportunities** with local institutions of higher education (e.g., colleges of education and colleges of business) to secure leadership-training opportunities for new and experienced board members.

School Improvement Rubrics & Policies

District Leadership

[Arizona](#)'s 2005 rubric includes Standard 1: School and District Leadership, in which the district and school leadership focuses on improved student achievement (p. 11). Standard one includes criteria such as:

- 1.3: Leadership (i.e., governing board, district administration, and principals) has led an inclusive process of developing a sustained and shared philosophy, vision and mission that promotes a culture of excellence.
- 1.6: All administrators have growth plans focused on the development of effective leadership skills that include the elements of the Standards and Rubrics for School Improvement.

Louisiana law ([LSA-R.S. 17:53](#)) requires all school board members to receive a minimum of 6 hours of training annually. The law also states:

In a city, parish, or other local public school district that has one or more schools identified as academically unacceptable or in need of academic assistance... at least two of the [required] hours... *shall focus on the improvement of schools* identified as failing schools as defined by the state board pursuant to such policies.

School Leadership

School improvement plans often involve increased training for teachers and school staff, as in the case of the [Pueblo 60](#) district in Colorado. Additionally, [Michigan](#)'s school improvement rubric includes Strand II: Leadership, in which school leaders create a school environment where everyone contributes to a cumulative, purposeful and positive effect on student learning (p.21).

Other Resources

- [Measures of Last Resort: Assessing Strategies for State-Initiated Turnaround](#), to be released next week, Center on Reinventing Public Education
- [Mass Insight Education's Turnaround Resources](#)
- Governance Generally:
 - [State Education Governance Models](#) (NASBE)
 - [State Education Governance Matrix](#) (NASBE)
 - [State Education Governance Models](#) (ECS)