



A Great Education for *All Students* Depends on Great Leadership

Promoting Transparency and Community Engagement

How School Boards Should Partner with Communities

An open and transparent school board can have a tremendous positive impact on student outcomes and overarching district success. By engaging the public in setting academic goals, standards, and developing strategies to meet set objectives, a school board can cultivate a groundswell of community support – support that is crucial to the advancement of student achievement.

Community engagement is a strategic opportunity to build public trust and to create consensus around the priorities and direction of the school district. It requires consistent, proactive discourse and regular opportunities to solicit feedback and ideas from interested citizens who want to play an active role in encouraging district improvement. Additionally, insight from the public helps ensure the school board's work adequately represents the needs of the community and adds an important layer of accountability to the board's actions.

As the [National Civic League](#) notes, “Where there is inclusive civic engagement, in which *everyone* has a place at the table to define, direct and implement public services and amenities, there is a greater civic pride and responsibility, which then lead to sustained community wellbeing.”

MNPS Trends in Transparency and Community Engagement

According to Nashville's [Metropolitan Board of Public Education](#), “The school board represents the public's voice in public education, providing oversight for what the public schools need and what the community wants.” The board's own [materials](#) underscore the importance of informing and engaging the public, stating, “The board shall keep the local community informed about the school system, its accomplishments, and its actions and build public support for the schools by involving the public in the planning process.”

However, some have questioned whether Nashville's school board is upholding its stated commitment to keeping the public informed of its actions, flagging concerns about [Open Meetings violations](#) and lack of public transparency around a [\\$7.5 million budget shortfall](#) in 2018. A 2019 audit highlighted overarching challenges with communication within the district, [noting](#) “lack of communication regarding standards, procedures and expectations” that contributed to low morale among district employees.

Best Practices in Collaboration

Experts, including [AASA, the School Superintendents Association](#), emphasize the importance of community engagement in building a more effective school district that supports greater student attainment. According to the [National School Boards Association](#) (NSBA), “Successful schools effectively engage families and communities in support of students. In doing so, they identify barriers to such engagement and work to overcome them.”

Four strategies to enhance school boards' efforts to communicate effectively with the public include:

- Establish a culture of transparency and collaboration among school board members and within the district as a whole. According to the [NSBA](#), "effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish strong communications structures. Those efforts inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals."
- Ensure the school board's commitment to openness and public engagement is ingrained in its ethos and can transcend any board or superintendent turnover.
- Periodically reassess public outreach and communications strategies to ensure they evolve appropriately to meet the changing needs and demographics of the community.
- Embrace openness and public accountability by seeking insight and asking for guidance from community stakeholders. By creating opportunities to foster discourse, and choosing not to shy away from speaking candidly about the district's challenges, school board members can build a sense of [collective leadership](#), encourage a sense of communal ownership of outcomes, and build trust.

Our Students and Families Deserve Strong Leadership

We believe it is of the utmost importance to have a functional school board in sync with its Director of Schools and our Mayor, together offering a clear vision, a plan, and leadership fully focused on improving academic outcomes for ALL students.

Nashville residents should have an opportunity to learn about the priorities of current and prospective school board members. That's why NashvilleNOW recently joined several education advocacy and community organizations to [host a virtual forum](#) designed to help voters learn more about the priorities of current and prospective school board members in advance of the August 6 election. **We encourage you to take time to [WATCH the archive of the forum](#) to hear directly from school board candidates.**

Additionally, NashvilleNOW asked school board candidates to complete a brief survey to shed light on their priorities for MNPS students and their views on the role and responsibilities of the school board in fostering success. [View the results of the surveys here.](#)

We also encourage you to take a moment to learn about the challenges facing the MNPS Board and opportunities to build board strength by reviewing past documents from this series of issue briefs. See [previous white papers](#) on:

- ["A School Board's Obligation to Support Improved Student Outcomes"](#)
- ["Assessing the Roles and Responsibilities of the MNPS School Board"](#)
- ["The Importance of Hiring and Managing an Effective Director of Schools"](#)
- ["Examining a School Board's Fundamental Fiscal Responsibilities"](#)