

National School Boards Association Statement on Fordham Institute Study

The report, “Does School Board Leadership Matter?” released March 26, 2014 by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute in Washington, DC, affirms the fact that local school boards matter and that their actions can positively impact student achievement. The study sheds additional light on what makes a quality school board, and adds further support to a Jan. 2011 research review issued by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Center for Public Education (CPE) on the “[Eight Characteristics of Effective Boards.](#)”

As such, the new Fordham Institute report makes a valuable contribution to the field of school board research, especially when viewed alongside other research, such as the CPE report, that also show a relationship between school board behaviors and higher student achievement. We appreciate the transparency with which Fordham Institute indicates the limitations of its findings, which were based in part on a prior Fordham Institute-NSBA-Iowa School Boards Foundation national survey of school boards, “[School Boards Circa 2010: Governance in the Accountability Era.](#)” As with all correlational studies, reviewers of the Fordham Institute report should use caution when interpreting findings, some of which are based on questionable assumptions. For example, in determining the accuracy of school board members’ knowledge of district funding, the authors conflate relative per pupil dollars with school board members’ perceptions about how sufficient those dollars are — two entirely different things.

Nonetheless, NSBA appreciates the Fordham Institute focus on providing greater insight around effective local school board governance, recognizing that school boards need the support of key influencers such as parents, teachers, principals and others who help to create positive teaching and learning environments. We look forward to continuing our collaboration on this important issue.