



To: Senate Education Committee
From: Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director
Re: NEASC - Should Everyone Do It?
Date: February 22, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on NEASC accreditation. In preparation for this testimony, I listened to the testimony that NEASC President Cameron Staples provided to this committee on January 25, 2023 as well as NEASC testimony to the House Education Committee on January 26, 2023. According to the testimony, approximately 25 Vermont public high schools are currently accredited by NEASC.

According to the [United State Department of Education](#), “accreditation is the process used in U.S. education to ensure that schools, postsecondary institutions, and other education providers meet, and maintain, minimum standards of quality and integrity regarding academics, administration, and related services. It is a voluntary process based on the principle of academic self-governance.”

As I understand it, this committee is interested in the question of whether every Vermont school should be accredited by NEASC. I gleaned from the Chair’s questions posed to Mr. Staples that you are wondering if NEASC accreditation should be required as a way to improve all of our schools across the state. According to the testimony of Mr. Staples, there is no research on the effect of NEASC accreditation on school improvement/student achievement.

Since the committee is interested in school improvement based on research, I am bringing your attention to recent and ongoing research on effective school boards and their role in advancing student achievement. This research suggests a probable relationship between school board beliefs, behaviors, and actions and student achievement.

The Iowa Lighthouse Study

The Iowa Association of School Boards conducted ongoing research on effective school boards and their role in advancing student achievement. The studies identified characteristics of school boards of districts with higher levels of student achievement and how they may affect their districts’ performance. The conclusion: School board actions are a

key part of a “culture of improvement,” and school boards can create conditions that promote student learning. “*IASB’s Lighthouse Study School Boards and Student Achievement*,” *Iowa School Board Compass*, Vol. V, No. 2, Fall 2000, © Iowa Association of School Boards, Des Moines, Iowa.

[Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards by Dervarics and O’Brien](#) The Center of Public Education, the research arm of the National School Boards Association, conducted a meta-analysis of ten studies and reports on school board leadership, including several based on the Iowa Lighthouse Study. The result is eight characteristics of effective school boards. One of the most reputable research-informed lists of attributes of effective school boards, the Eight Characteristics is a structure commonly referenced on the national level and when researchers are studying school boards.

[The Science of Student Achievement by Lorentzen and McCaw](#) Building upon the existing research, the authors identified specific actions and behaviors of school boards that they can statistically support as having a correlation with improving student success.

If the committee is interested in learning more about the research, we are fortunate to have an expert here in Vermont. Dr. Phil Gore is the Director of Board Services for the Vermont School Boards Association and is available to testify on this topic. Dr. Gore is the co-author of the book *Improving School Board Effectiveness: A Balanced Governance Approach* and the author of an article published in the American School Board Journal this month:

[Achievement, Culture, and What Comes Next.](#)

Vermont’s District Quality Standards and Education Quality Standards

Act 127 of 2022 requires each Vermont school district to meet school district quality standards adopted by rule of the AOE regarding the business, facilities management, and governance practices of school districts. The Secretary of Education asked VSBA to develop draft governance standards for his consideration, to be incorporated in the newly required district quality standards. This past summer and fall, the VSBA did this work by convening a task force of eleven school board members from across the state.

In conducting its work, the task force reviewed national research on best practices in governance, particularly those studies relating to how boards may affect student outcomes and support closing achievement gaps. They invited input from all publicly elected school board members, superintendents, and representatives from the Act I working group.

The final version of the proposed draft governance standards was approved by the full VSBA Board. It recognizes that effective governance by school boards is an essential component in district quality and outlines three categories for effective governance: Priorities, Protocols, and Processes. The [proposed draft standards are linked here](#) for your information.

The Agency of Education included VSBA's proposed governance standards in its [District Quality Standards Draft Rules](#) along with standards on business operations, facilities management and safety and a process for school district quality reviews. The District Quality Standards, when coupled with the Education Quality Standards, provide a mandatory system of quality assurance that is Vermont focused and more stringent than an external accreditation process.

Conclusion

Based on the above information, whether or not to participate in an external accreditation process such as NEASC should be a voluntary, local decision for Vermont public schools.