

The Weights We Carry

By Matt Lehrman

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“Even a small weight becomes overwhelming when carried long enough.”

Again and again, as I travel the country, I’m struck by how often that idea emerges—woven into the hopes, frustrations, and quiet resilience shared by school board members and administrators. Their words stay with me.

What follows is not a policy paper or a position statement. It’s a reflection—an attempt to recognize and honor the various weights that champions of public education carry, and the shared purpose that gives them meaning.

Let’s reflect on the many kinds of weight we carry as school board members and administrators—not just physically, but emotionally, politically, and personally.

Some of these burdens are visible. Most are not.
But each has a cost. And over time, the strain accumulates.

Let’s name just a few...

We carry the **weight of community distrust**, where misinformation spreads faster than facts—where even basic needs, like repairing a roof or upgrading water systems, are questioned by those who assume the worst.

We carry the **weight of disconnection**, trying to represent all voices in a community where needs are diverse, segmented, and sometimes at odds—and where meaningful engagement is hard to achieve.

We carry the **weight of dysfunction**, when our board meetings become battlegrounds of personal agendas, vendettas, or confusion about governance—and where incivility drives good people away.

We carry the **weight of distraction**, as energy is consumed by social media outrage, false rumors, and reactive politics—leaving little room for thoughtful leadership.

We carry the **weight of role confusion**, when those who govern stray from setting direction—the *what*—and start micromanaging the *how*, undermining the leadership roles entrusted to staff.

We carry the **weight of weak alignment**, when we're not on the same page about what responsible and effective leadership requires—or how to hold ourselves to it.

We carry the **weight of burnout**, as the heroes grow weary, the tank runs dry, and yet the expectation remains that we'll keep showing up, keep giving more, with less.

We carry the **weight of navigating political, cultural, and societal tensions**—when what happens in our board meetings is driven by forces outside our schools, our communities, and outside our control.

And that's not all...

We carry the **weight of declining enrollment**—of shrinking communities, rising housing costs, and the diversion of students and depletion of funding.

We carry the **weight of budget strain**, managing through scarcity as inflation, infrastructure needs, and student services grow more expensive by the day.

We carry the **weight of staff turnover**, where institutional memory is lost and leadership continuity feels fragile.

We carry the **weight of legislative overreach**, when policies crafted without local input disrupt classrooms, stretch resources, and limit our capacity to lead responsibly.

We carry the **weight of special education**, because public schools are called to serve every student—including those others can turn away—even when funding is scarce and resources are stretched.

We carry the **weight of civic erosion**, defending public education not just as a service, but as a democratic institution—when fewer people seem to believe in it, or truly cherish what it represents.

We carry the **weight of a profession in peril**, watching fewer people choose to teach—and knowing that passion alone isn't enough. It must be matched with pay, respect, and the stability needed to stay and succeed.

We carry the **weight of a fraying school culture**, where student wellbeing, teacher morale, and the sense of community are worn thin—and where mental health is not just a student concern, but a leadership challenge at every level.

If this feels heavy... it's because it is.

But here's the truth:

We are not alone. And we do not carry this weight for nothing.

We carry it for our students.

We carry it for our dedicated educators.

We carry it for our schools.

We carry it for the future of our communities.

We carry it for the promise of opportunity that education unlocks—for every learner, in every classroom.

And we carry it for something even larger—

We carry it for the future of a free society.

We carry it for the promise that every child deserves access to a meaningful education and a future of possibility.

We carry it for the strength of democracy itself—

Where the spirit of togetherness begins,

Where knowledge and skills are purposefully conveyed,

Where curiosity and creativity are sparked,

Where public education fuels the promise of the American ideal,

And where the future is shaped.

We acknowledge the weight we carry—not to be crushed by it, but to better share it.

To support one another,

So that we may lead with clarity, compassion, and courage.

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