

# You just *have* to read “Trees and Kids”

There is an unusual tree commonly known as the Chinese Bamboo Tree. It is real. Years ago I heard a speaker talk about it, using it to make a point. It stuck in my head. I even did some research to find out if the speaker was blowing smoke and made up the tree. He didn't.

[The excerpt is from Jim Burgett's [Teachers Change Lives 24/7: 150 Ways to Do it Right.](#)]

The story goes like this. You prepare the soil, pick the right spot, then plant the Chinese Bamboo Tree. You water it and wait. But you wait an entire year and nothing appears. No bud, no twig, nothing. So you keep watering and protecting the area and taking care of the future plant, and you wait some more. You wait another year and nothing still happens. Okay, you are a persistent person not prone to giving up, so you keep on watering. You water, check the soil, start talking to the ground, maybe even click your heels in some kind of growing dance you read about in the *National Geographic*. Another year passes and still no sign of growth.

It has been three years. Should you give up? Someone told you that it might take a while to really see the fruits of your efforts, so you keep on keeping on. More water, more talk, more dancing. The neighbors are wondering. And another year passes. No tree.

You now make a decision. If there is no tree on this date one year from now you will stop watering. Period. So you begin year number five with the same passion as day number one. You water, you wait.

You keep watering and keep waiting. You water some more and then, could it be? Is it really? Yep, there it is, something

sticking out of the dirt. You come back the next day and WOW it has really grown! In fact you come back each day for about six weeks and finally the Chinese Bamboo tree stops growing—but it is over 80 feet tall! Yes, 80 feet in six weeks! Well, not really. It is 80 feet in five years.

The point is simple. If you had given up for even the shortest period of time, there would be no tree. It took almost impossible persistence. The Chinese Bamboo tree is there for one reason and one reason only—because you never gave up on it.

When I talk to teachers at workshops or institutes I find one who teaches first grade and I ask that person to mentally think of a student who they wouldn't mind see moving to another district. You get the drift, a student who is a real challenge. Let's give the student a name. I'll use my own name to be politically correct. The kid is named Jim. I ask the teacher if they ever had a student like Jim that they really worked hard with, tried every trick in the book, searched for new ways to meet the child's learning needs, and so on, but still felt that at the end of the year that Jim had not learned. That Jim was still a challenge, and although he met the minimum standards to pass, he was not on the teacher's list of proudest achievements. Most teachers usually agree that they have, or had, a Jim in their class.

Now we move to a second grade teacher and we pretend that they get Jim in the fall, work with him all year, watch their hair turn from brunette to shades of stressful gray, and by the end of the year feel they did their best, but it wasn't good enough.

Now, for a minute, let's talk about little Jimmy. He's not in special ed. Jimmy is just a jerk. Don't fall off your chair and gasp, "Did he call that kid a jerk?" I did, but not the jerk you are thinking of. My JERK is an acronym for Just Educationally Resistive Kid. He doesn't have ADD or any other

alphabetized condition. He just doesn't like to learn and he resists it. He isn't a bad kid or a troublemaker. "Jimmys" exist in all sizes and shapes and even come in girl forms.

Let's jump to grade three. We have the same conversation all over again. Jim is passed on but he is a disappointment to every teacher so far, and they all worry that if things don't turn around Jim could become a troublemaker or an academic disgrace.

Jim holds his own in grade four. No big changes. He surely doesn't love school, but he isn't failing anything. He exhibits no passion for anything at the schoolhouse. And no signs of any real change either.

Grade five. Jim has a new teacher and all the other teachers try to warn her that Jim is, well, how do we say it? Jim is special, but not special ed. He exists, but barely. He will continue to be a challenge, but he's not a threat to safety. Jim is Jim. Try anything, but nothing will probably work. If you don't believe me, ask all of his previous teachers.

At semester break the new teacher makes a comment about Jim at a teachers meeting. With anticipated sadness, everyone listens. Here is what she says...

"Jim is quite a writer. He turned in a couple of stories and I told him he was very creative. He is now writing a mystery story and it is good! And he's also showing some talent in basketball. He's really growing too. I love his passion to play ball and write. He seems to thrive on the success of his hook shot and his imagination. I really enjoy that kid." Jim has arrived!

Was it the new teacher who pulled out Jim's hidden talents and secret love for learning? Was it some biological change that caused Jim to mature and become a better learner, a more serious student? Was it his physical abilities that expanded his self-esteem and made it easier for him to write?

Maybe it was a little of all these things, but it was also what I call the Chinese Bamboo Factor. Every teacher Jim had since he entered school worked hard providing opportunities for Jim to learn, to grow, and to become. Every teacher watered, fertilized, and cared for Jim. Even when the year ended and they were sometimes glad to pass him on to another teacher, they still knew that they had done their best to give him the best.

Oh, by the way, my story could stop and start at any grade. And Jim could be Janet, and the teacher could be a he rather than a she. It doesn't matter. What does matter is the Chinese Bamboo Factor—never, ever quit on a student. Even when you see no progress, it doesn't mean that the kid isn't processing something somehow somewhere.

One more thing, a big thing: the Chinese Bamboo Tree did start to grow very shortly after the seed was planted. The roots grew deep and strong for many years before there was any sign of a plant above ground. Sometimes that same thing happens with kids. They develop a foundation of learning. They learn to learn. They creep along doing the minimum, building their strengths (or finding them), and sometimes they just wait for the right combination of factors before they bloom. It may be the motivation of a certain teacher or a new found confidence or skill. It may be that all of a sudden "they get it" and learning becomes exciting. If we knew exactly what the formula was and how it worked for everyone, we could probably cure the ills of the world.

So what do we learn from the Chinese Bamboo Tree? I'd suggest the following:

- \* It takes patience to teach some, even most, kids.
- \* When you give up on a kid, you give up on a human being.
- \* Even when you don't see progress, if you do your best, it is probably happening.
- \* If something doesn't work with a kid, try something else—but

never quit trying.

- \* Some of our best teaching doesn't "break soil" until all conditions are right.
- \* When you think you are growing a tree, you may be growing a root.
- \* Strong roots support strong trees.
- \* Sometimes it takes a lot of patience to change a life.

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The author is Jim Burgett, and he came by my surname honorably—he's my famous kid brother, maybe the best known educator in the Midwest. Not only has he published six books for teachers and K-12 administrators, he also speaks at conventions and conferences just about everywhere. (Is my pride seeping through?)

Because I've been asked so often, Jim wrote (or co-authored) these books too:

- \* What Every Superintendent and Principal Needs to Know (with Max MGee and Jim Rosborg)
- \* The Perfect School (with Max MGee and Jim Rosborg)
- \* Finding Middle Ground in K-12 Education (with Brian Schwartz),
- \* The School Principal's Toolbook, and
- \* The Art of School Boarding

More information about Jim is at [BurgettGroup.com](http://BurgettGroup.com); specifics about the books [here](#).

I shared this story here several years back but I have been asked repeatedly to do it again. So here it is, if it helps explain the other little "Jimmys" you know, or that teaching friends lovingly endure, or if it took an extraordinarily long time for you (or, you suspect, your kids) to pop through your own almost forgotten plot on your way to your own special gift.

Best wishes,

# Can we sell two new books by using 12,200 jumbo postcards?

At 11" x 6," the postcards are big enough to cover other books already on the potential buyer's desk. But the real issue is, **are the cards clever enough to lovingly pick the buyers' pocket?**

Said another way, it will cost us about \$6500 to get the sales missive done right and delivered on time. But will the returns grossly exceed that cost while we are still in the same flesh? (Three months will tell the tale, hoping for a third of that in three weeks.)

I'm a niche publisher. A few years back my firm hit a bulls-eye designing, creating, and selling standard operating procedures manuals for dentists. Now we create and sell books to K-12 administrators: mostly principals, superintendents, school board members, and teachers. Flossing was pretty much what I knew about dentistry at the earlier incarnation, and avoiding the grumpy old dudes who ran schools was my gift as a kid. How the niche publishing came about is another blog, or several—go to the search box on this blog and write "**niche publishing**" and you can read what I've said so far. Or read my book: [Niche Publishing: Publish Profitably Every Time](#).

The bottom line is that I don't write education (or dental) books: I get first-rate leaders (preferably already speaking widely in their field) who are experts about the target topics. **They are the heroes**. They share their hard-earned well of knowledge—in writing. (I have had 46 books published that I

did write, but that's a different, and concurrent, life!)

Here the expert is my younger brother, Jim, and these are his fifth and sixth books for me. Why him? I can't find anybody else with more experience, ideas, and recognition among other superintendents, principals, and teachers, nor anybody who has also given so many key speeches to conferences, conventions, academies, ... Anyway, he's a lot of fun, disciplined, and full of reliable genes, good ideas, and true stories...

But here's what's up now. Jim wrote two books that I want to sell simultaneously: [The Art of School Boarding: What Every School Board Member Needs to Know](#) and [The School Principal's Toolbook](#). (We try to make our titles so clear that a buyer knows what's inside before lifting the cover, so I hope these too are self-explanatory.) They are dynamite books but running two separate selling campaigns costs money—and we think one campaign makes giant sense.

**Here's the most important item on the card:**



Our buying target is the SUPERINTENDENT, who is chosen by the Board and chooses the principals! If the other two don't work, he or she doesn't either, at least for long. The rest of the postcard explains the books, shows the covers, summarizes the tables of contents in key words, soothes the super's soul in three paragraphs each of selling prose, all leading to four wee questions, "(Do

you) want to review a free ebook copy (of one or both books)? ... read testimonials? ... check the author's credentials? ... or order copies, with the usual discounts?" Then it politely sends the mesmerized 12,200 superintendents (a large percentage of all of them in the U.S.) to [www.meetingk-12needs.com](http://www.meetingk-12needs.com) for the rest, to decide and close the



school chiefs at once. Does it make sense? Was the superintendent the right target? Will I starve my wife, kids, and myself to death?

2. Find a reliable, current, affordable **mailing list** of superintendents. Google first, limit it to four, and call and let them (quickly) sell their wares and virtues to me.

3. Find a fast, reliable **printer** who is comfortable with jumbo cards and can also sync the mailing (I send the list) and provide inexpensive small adjustment art tweaks, if necessary.

4. Find a card (or graphics art) **designer** (or design it yourself if you are experienced) and get the copy, changes, colors, and the rest pulled together on time.

5. Find the **money** and distribute it gratefully when everybody does what you want—preferably, far better than you imagined.

6. Get my **website** up-to-date, and go through the link lines the buyers will visit so it's all current, easy to follow, and delay-free. Like the supermarket, don't slow the buyer down but be sure he/she at least sees your other products and services along the way.

7. Plan the **fulfillment**. Get the free ebook email ready; write thank-you model replies to your lucky customers; find envelopes, bags, or boxes for shipping; set up a meter mail system with the post office; get tape and all the incidentals; listen to your phone message and make it clear and relevant; set up an invoicing system for direct purchases (usually for purchase orders); double-check your shopping cart process (if used); line up helpers if needed, and lay in enough book stock to cover the initial surge, with a fall-back five-day POD replenishment lever ready to pull if good fortune gushes in.

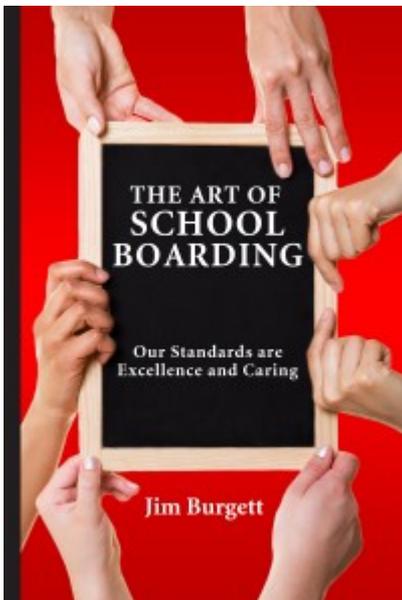
That's it. "Cross" is the word of the day. My fingers are crossed—or my banker will be cross. See you soon.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

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# Top Ten Strategies for Developing an A+ Board of Education



A Board of Education that works well together, supports the mission of the district, respects and communicates positively with the superintendent, and comes to the table with no agenda other than to do what is best for kids in a reasonable and intelligent way is a Board to behold! Is it possible to find seven people who can do this? Of course, but it takes savvy and leadership from the top. Here are ten strategies that may help develop that A+ Board of Education. (Jim Burgett, author and speaker.)

1. Start the process before new Board members are elected.

When a citizen takes out a petition, or indicates they are thinking about running for the Board, go to work! Do some invaluable pre-service prepping before they invest their time and money. Give them a free copy of [The Art of School Boarding](#), a book that clearly and honestly outlines the job responsibilities and mindset they need before they get involved getting elected. Encourage them to read the book, and offer to answer any questions. Make sure they are aware of the necessary time commitments.

2. Continue the training as soon as they are chosen. Without delay invite the new members in for a session with you and possibly your cabinet. Give them a general review of the funding process, the budget outline, the procedures for developing board packets, and other communications they will need.

3. Introduce new Board members to the central office staff so they know who does what in the office. Offer to take them to school buildings. Answer all the questions they ask, and more. Be open and thoughtful.

4. Meet them for a one-on-one lunch (or early breakfast) and talk about families, past history, their relationship with the district, etc.

5. Train (or remind) all Board members about the importance of the chain of command. Review who reports to whom, what the organizational structure is, and how the entire system works. Include facilities, transportation, and food services. You can't expect them to follow the chain if they don't know it. You might even engage in some faux case studies so they see how the Board members know the staff and the chain.

6. Handling complaints will be one of the toughest tasks a Board member must do. Teach them the art of receiving a complaint and then handling it. (In **The Art of School Boarding** that's called "catching" and "throwing" a complaint.) It is a

process that shows every Board Member how to properly and effectively handle any random or planned complaint from phone calls at home to unexpected visits in the store. Sticking to the outlined process is a win-win-win for the complainer, the Board Member, and the school.

7. Remind the Board who does what whenever possible or when it may seem unclear. This helps keep everyone's roles and responsibilities neat and clean. "That task falls to the building principal according to the policies you have established," is a sample reminder of who does what.

8. Periodically, with all Board members, review the steps of routine processes. Examples of these processes might be how to change or write Board policy, set a tax levy, who and how staff are recommended for hire or dismissal, or how disciplinary hearings are held. Some of these events happen infrequently, some annually, some often, but an A+ Board must be aware of the specifics each time. A warm-up lesson before the tax levy meeting, or a handout listing the steps in a disciplinary hearing (before the event happens), for example, makes everyone a better participant. It also helps to guide those who will be experiencing the process for the first time. Even a private tutoring session for new members might be helpful.

9. Distribute the School Board Association's Code of Ethics every month and read/review one item from the list. This is often done at the beginning of every meeting, to emphasize the importance of the Code and to help all follow it. It doesn't hurt to read and review the District Mission Statement frequently too.

10. Don't get so caught up with budgets, basketball, beans, and buses that talking about people is forgotten! Reminding the Board that they are really in session for kids might help, as might a reminder that most of the staff works very hard and a thank you to them for their personal service is always much

appreciated.

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## Information about **The Art of School Boarding: What Every School Board Member Needs to Know**

by Jim Burgett

Jim Burgett's new book, *The Art of School Boarding*, explains what a school board really is, what functions it must perform, how it does that best, what its members can (and can't) legally do, and how every school boarder can be extraordinary every day they serve. (But some won't be because they don't know how—until now.) This book is written in plain (sometimes unconsciously humorous), jargon-free prose for school board rookies, veterans, superintendents, other administrators, and you. It should be mandatory reading for candidates seeking board election—read before they run and again before they serve.

But why accept what Jim Burgett says about boardsmanship, or the other 20 experts whose case studies the book includes? Because during his 40 years as an educator he has written five books for school leaders, provided hundreds of training sessions for aspiring and active school board members, and trained and/or consulted with dozens of school boards concerning internal issues, governance, and strategic planning. Jim was selected "Illinois Administrator of the Year" by the American Association of School Administrators and the Illinois Association of Educational Office Professionals. He is also in persistent demand to speak about K-12 education nationwide.

Being a school board member is not a political position, nor one of royalty. It's held in modest esteem. Board members deal with families, law, curricula, finances, mandates, athletics, the fine arts—the list goes on. No pay, tough issues, lots of controversy, much reading... Oh yes, the future of the community

it serves is in its hands.

“School Boarding” is indeed an art. Boards have their own purpose, means, personality, process, and protocol. These pages help them define their mission, their governance, and the role of the board, its members, and the administration. Explained are ethical expectations and Codes of Conduct, and how the board handles community concerns and builds vital relationships. The Art of School Boarding’s straightforward common sense simply explains what present or future school board members have to know.

ISBN-13: 978-0989653046 (bound); 978-0989653053 (digital)

Category: Education/School Board

Price: \$24.95 (bound), \$20 (digital)

Formats: Bound (paperback) and digital

Trim: 6 x 9

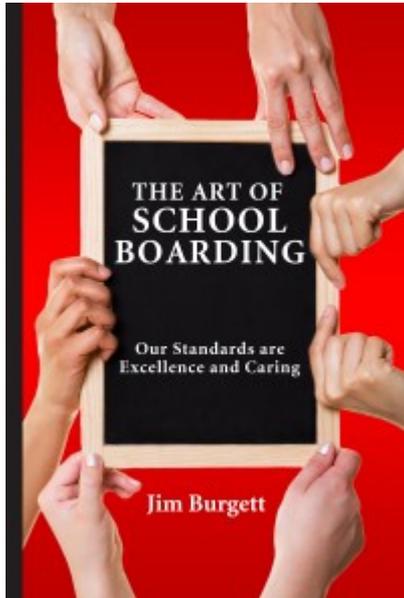
Page Count: 168

Further information at (800) 563-1454 or at [meetingk-12needs.com](http://meetingk-12needs.com).

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## **30 key points about The Art of School Boarding**



Jim Burgett's just-released book, [The Art of School Boarding](#), is our newest release from Education Communication Unlimited, in both paperback (from [us](#) and CreateSpace) and in digital versions (in .pdf from [us](#) and in the respective reader versions from Kindle, Barnes & Noble, Smashwords, and Scribd).

Here are specific ordering [details](#), plus much more about the book's contents and Jim's extensive, award-winning background in K-12 education.

Would you also like to read some **key extracts** from **The Art of School Boarding**?

Here is a summarized Table of Contents and 30 segments directly from the book.

### **Summary Table of Contents**

1. Boarding Basics
2. Why Does Anyone Want to Board?
3. The Foundational Principles of School Governance
4. Board Roles and Superintendent Roles
5. Boarding Code of Conduct
6. Know the Chain of Command
7. Learn the Art of Receiving and Responding to Complaints
8. Never Forget Who Comes First

9. Money Matters
10. Programs and Growth
11. Relationships
12. School Boarding at its Best
13. Expert Advice
14. Taking Care of You
15. The Ride

\* This book should be mandatory reading by every new member of every school board in America. They should read it before they seek election or accept appointment.

\* Being a member of a board of education is one of the most important jobs that a person can hold, and it should be reserved for people who have the courage, the fortitude, and the desire to make a difference.

\* (Being on a school board) is not an easy job, but it's a very important one. The lives of every kid in this country, our kids, are at stake. And so is the present and future fabric of our nation.

\* Who else should read its pages? Current board members, both as a reminder of the pledge they have made and to provide a unifying language, shared process, and commonly held goal that they and their new followers can seek together.

\* I'm writing this book because it needs to be written. It is intended to serve as a guide, a primer, a companion, a training manual, a motivational tool, and a down-to-earth conversation starter about a job that is always, for those involved, a life-changing event.

\* "School Boarding" is a verb that captures movement and change. The "Art of School Boarding" is the process that propels and steers that change.

\* I think school boards in general are doing a superb job, despite the fact that much of that is done "by the seat of

their pants.” And much of that is because too many of the members just don’t know any better. And some don’t care.

\* You see, some folks run for the school board without understanding both its importance and its complexity. Some, once elected, simply don’t get it. And some lose their vigor and vision. So maybe a straightforward, common sense, jargon-free book like this can help all of the board members become essential components of a crucial process for helping kids. Perhaps it can provide a shared starting point for boards of education working as cohesive teams, knowing their purpose, rolling up their collective sleeves, and never losing focus while making a true difference. Helping school boards “board” in a positive, effective, and meaningful manner, then, is the goal of this book, the very reason for its existence.

\* This book contains the kind of information that board members, particularly beginners or others considering joining, should know, like being a member of a board of education is an act of noble and selfless public service.

\* Being a member of a board of education takes time. If done right, it is a time-consuming task.

\* There are no board of education members who don’t face difficult decisions, votes, or issues. Nor any who haven’t had to defend his or her decisions many times. This is a job that often includes some degree of conflict.

\* (Being on a school board) can be fun and rewarding. It is always life changing. But it can also be taxing and frustrating. One thing for certain, it is not a job to be entered into lightly.

\* This is not a textbook. It has no footnotes, nor many statistics. It comes from me (who sat through thousands of hours of school board meetings), mentors, and colleagues with a century-plus of school board experience... The format is casual, like a conversation.

\* School boarding isn't a science—I taught science. Yes, there are some rules, procedures, and recommended guidelines. What makes it an art (as in *The Art of School Boarding*) is that at the core what we most need to share is thoughtfulness, tact, and the process (really the art) of building relationships.

\* School board members mold, direct, and outline the educational opportunities of children and adults. Would it be too theatrical to say that they hold the future of mankind in the palm of their hand? Well, if mankind is composed of one person at a time, one new opportunity, one creative philosophy permitting another, then maybe, just maybe, theatricality borders on reality. You have an opportunity to change the world.

\* From the minute you are elected or appointed a school board member you hold a position of public authority. Your vote always counts. You become responsible for huge sums of money, the stewardship of property, and the employment and welfare of many human beings. Essentially, you hold the personal livelihood of people in the power of your vote. And not only the individual, but his/her family.

\* Can it be rewarding to be a school board member? You bet. Consider the rewards—permanent ones, each growing with every kid from day one in kindergarten to graduation day from high school, and spin-offs all the days that follow.

\* The Pros (of school boarding) are serving mankind, volunteering for the good of society, helping young people have a chance for success, making sure opportunities are fair and appropriate, and being accountable to those who elected you by being diligent in your duties and demonstrating professional and respectable behavior.

\* The school board is the “corporate” entity charged by law with the task of governing a legally defined school district.

\* School boards write and approve district policies that

clearly define delegation. In fact, almost every aspect of a school board's authority should be contained in a well-crafted set of policies. The board has the ultimate responsibility for every aspect of school governance, but those responsibilities need to be easily understood and well crafted.

\* The board of education is the engine that runs the system. The engine transforms power into action; thus, the superintendent is like the transmission, taking the energy and converting it into productive motion.

\* The superintendent is hired to do the following: understand, interpret, refine, and implement the vision, mission, goals and policy as set forth by the board of education. That's one powerful and jam-packed expectation.

\* The superintendent's role is ... to take the decisions made by the school board and to implement them, in accordance with both their request, existing policy, and in compliance with legal and ethical restrictions.

\* Knowing where you stand in the flow also helps you direct yourself to the right place. Your place in every organizational chart (as a school board member) is at the top, at least within the district. Some charts may put state government or state leaders over you, but within the district you are generally considered the last stop, the head honcho, the buck stopper. And next to you, down the scale only one notch or position, is the person you hired and hold responsible, the superintendent.

\* "Who comes first?" The answer is always "the kids." Call them students, children, young adults, pre-adolescents, adolescents, infants, or whatever, all of these are, in my thinking, "the kids." If you program your thinking in this direction, then everything, absolutely everything, you do will in some way affect the kids and their opportunity to learn.

\* I recommend, without any hesitation, that school board

members ask the tough questions.

\* Everything in this chapter (about school finances) defines the word “art” in the title of this book. The reason is simple: managing and projecting school finances is not, and never will be, a science. Certainly the cash in, cash out accounting procedures are pure science and legally controlled, but no district will ever know for sure the future of the financial variables.

\* I can’t tell you how many times I have told teachers over the years, “Never discipline kids, just behaviors.”

\* I have often pictured a board of education as a jigsaw puzzle with eight pieces. Seven are the individual pieces that fit together, each piece representing one of the (board members). The eighth makes up the border of the puzzle. All the inside pieces fit inside the border. The border is the superintendent. He/she holds everything together and provides the boundaries, protection, and (the) shape of the puzzle. When the board is cohesive and working well, all the inside pieces fit nicely together with no binding (or) straining, clearly displaying a comprehensive “picture” of the district.

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**Jim Burgett** is a frequent keynoter, workshop provider, academy presenter, and consultant throughout the United States. His audiences include school administrators, teachers, board members, businesses, and institutions. When his audiences evaluate his presentations, three words frequently appear: passionate, inspirational, and practical. Jim’s mission is simply “To make a difference.”

Jim is the author of [Teachers Change Lives 24/7](#), the coauthor of [Finding Middle Ground in K-12 Education](#) (with Brian Schwartz, General Counsel and Associate Director of the Illinois Principals Association), and coauthor of two other best-selling books for administrators, [What Every](#)

[Superintendent and Principal Needs to Know](#) and [The Perfect School](#) (both with Max McGee, President of the Illinois Math and Science Academy, and Jim Rosborg, Director of Graduate Education at McKendree University).

Burgett has taught and served as principal and superintendent at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. He was twice named administrator of the year by his peers, and has won many other awards. Burgett serves on several boards for many organizations. Following a full career as a working educator, he is now the lead member of The Burgett Group and focuses on providing exceptional professional development. For details, see [www.burgettgroup.com](http://www.burgettgroup.com).