# Township of Union Public Schools
# Board of Education/Superintendent Retreat
# April 30, 2022
# Agenda

### Saturday, April 30, 2022 - 9:00 AM – 2:30 PM

**Participants:**  Union Township Board of Education Members

Union Township Superintendent and District Leadership Team

**Retreat Objectives:**

1. Achieve board and superintendent agreement of their respective roles and responsibilities in the development, implementation, assessment and monitoring of the district' "Journey to Excellence" strategic plan.

2. Develop agreement on components of effective communications process/procedures to support communications among and between the board and superintendent; senior leadership team.

3, Board and superintendent agreement on establishing, implementing and monitoring guidelines to support the effective and efficient operation of board committees.


**9:15-9:30 WELCOME**

- **Board President Mary Lynn Williams**
- **Superintendent of Schools Dr. Scott Taylor**
- **Retreat Objectives/Agenda Review, Norms - L. Leverett**
- **Community Building Circle - L. Leverett**


**9:30-11:00 PM**

- **Effective Board Committee Structure/Communications**
- **Effective Board of Education Committees**
      Resources:  -  The Board at Work:  Effective Committees
- **Review of Best Practices of Effective Board Committees**
      Resources:  -  Ohio State Board – Best Practices Committees
                  -  Example:  Montgomery School Board Committees
- **Review sample school district's communications procedures**

Resource: - Howard.Bd. Communications Tool
- **Discussion: What communication tools/processes are in place in Union Township? Which tools work effectively for the board? Superintendent? What are areas that can be more effective?**
    Resources: - Effective Board and Superintendent Collaboration Report
    - Communications Agreement Worksheet (4's)

**11:00-11:30 PM LUNCH**

**11:30 – 12:30 PM**

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities of the Superintendent and Board of Education for the success of the district's Journey to Excellence strategic plan.**

- **Overview of Strategic Plans roles/responsibilities of Board and Superintendent:**

    1. Core Strategic Planning foundation documents
        - Authentically Owned Core Values
        - Board Vision Statement,
        - District Mission Statement
        - Authentic Annual Board/District Goals What the literature says?

    2. Role clarification:
        - Role of the school board in the development, implementation, monitoring and assessment of district strategic plan
        - Role of the superintendent in the development, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the district strategic plan

    3. Superintendent's overview of the present status and targets/projections of "Journey for Excellence" strategic plan for the 2022-23 school year

    4. Clarify the next level of work for the Board of Education and Superintendent
        - Resource: SWOT Analysis Worksheet
            → Using the worksheet make a list of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that can help or hinder the implementation of the "Journey of Excellence" strategic plan.

        - SMALL Group Discussions (Select Recorder and Reporter)
            - What are the areas of agreement in the areas of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities?
            - What is the consensus of the small group on the most significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?
            - Chart the agreements and recommendations to the full retreat community

        - LARGE Group Discussions:
            - Each small group reports the outcome of the SWOT
            - Brainstorm high leverage strategies to best utilize strengths and opportunities and reduce the impact of threats/weaknesses.
            - Identify the "next level of work for the Board and Superintendent to address their work to tackle high level strategies.

- Individual reflection on the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities that can impact the implementation of the "Journey of Excellence" strategic plan.
- Resources:  Journey to Excellence - District first draft of strategic plan

  → Top 10 Tips for Effective Strategic Planning

  → Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards

**12:30 – 1:00**

- **What worked well today?**
- **What didn't work well?**
- **Next level of work for the board and superintendent**

**1:00 – 2:00**

- **Ethics training**

# Chapter 10

# The Board at Work:  Effective Committees

*Critical Board Building Challenge: How does the board develop and maintain a committee structure that enhances its overall effectiveness?*

## Introduction

Effective committees are, in a word, indispensable. They do the bulk of the work of the charter school board, thereby freeing the full board for attention to matters like responding to emerging critical issues, strategic planning, major policy development and long range financial planning.

An effective committee structure plays the following crucial roles:

- Helps to increase the involvement of board directors because it gives them an opportunity to use their skills and experience.
- Provides a training ground for future leaders -- both for individuals who are currently board directors as well as non-board directors who may be asked to serve on the board in the future.
- Increases the visibility and outreach of the charter school by including non-board directors in committee membership.
- Provides a means for information to flow from the parents, students, community, and charter school staff to the board.
- Gives board directors the chance to discuss emerging issues in some depth.

Board committees operate at the board level, not the staff level. John Carver, author of <u>Boards That Make a Difference</u>, insists that the purpose of board committees is not to help the staff to do its work, but rather to help the board get the work of governance done. Sometimes boards will create committees that are designed to advise the staff, but this arrangement can blur the distinction between board and staff rolls.  These committees should be limited or, better still, not created at all.  It is important to remember, however, that in some charter schools committees may be involved in day-to-day operations, at least initially[1].  Boards in the earliest stages of charter school development, when there is no staff, clearly must take on what would be staff work in a more fully developed charter school.  Once the charter school is beyond its pre-organizing stage, it is important that the boards committees begin to relinquish such involvement in day-to-day operations.

---

[1] Hirzy, Ellen Cochran, <u>Nonprofit Board Committees</u>, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1993.

## Types of Committees

In general, there are two types of committees: standing and ad hoc. Standing committees are permanent committees, established in the organization's bylaws that relate to the ongoing governance of the charter school. Ad hoc, or special, committees have limited responsibilities and are created for specific purposes; for example a search committee that manages the search process and recommends a candidate for the charter school administrator position. Ad hoc committees should be instituted for a specific purpose and disbanded when the need for them no longer exists. Ad hoc committees are further discussed later under this chapter under the heading "Use of Task Forces and Work Groups."

## The Committee Structure

In general, the number of committees should be kept to a minimum. The committee structure should be of a sufficient number to enable the board to carry out its governance roles and responsibilities in an efficient and effective manner. Too many committees can create a cumbersome structure and in some cases, can invite micromanagement on the part of the board.

For many charter schools, the standing committee structure will include some or all of the following committees: executive, finance and budget, accountability, board development, and fund-raising. The Executive Committee deserves special attention.

**The Executive Committee.** A critical element in board effectiveness is a functioning executive committee. Generally the executive committee consists of the four executive officers of the Board: the president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. Sometimes other members of the board are included as part of the executive committee: for example chairs of the standing committees or at-large members from the board to assure representation of diverse viewpoints.

It is important to make sure that the use of an executive committee doesn't create an "inner board" consisting of executive committee members, and an "outer board" consisting of those without as much influence and information. Such a development can result in the board not operating together as an effective team. The most positive roles an executive committee can play are to oversee goal setting and agenda development and to serve as a preliminary sounding board for the chair of the board and the charter school administrator. However, the executive committee should not become a substitute for discussion of important matters by the entire board.

For this reason, it is important that the bylaws specify limits on the power of the executive committee if your charter school board chooses to have one. Each school must decide how much authority to grant its executive committee. There is no one's size fits all rule, except the full port must decide what is best for the charter school. Often the executive committee is not permitted to do one or more of the following:

- Amend the articles are bylaws;
- Dissolve the nonprofit corporation (if the school is a separately incorporated nonprofit organization);
- Dismiss or elect new board directors or officers;
- Hire or fire a charter school administrator;
- Enter into or alter major contracts such as the charter contract;
- Sue another entity;
- Change a board approved budget; and
- Adopt or eliminate major programs or services

At its best, the executive committee plays three critical roles: planning the agenda of board meetings, making decisions on behalf of the full board, and serving as a communication link with other members of the board, especially the committee chairs. These roles are described more fully in Chapter 4 of the governance guidebook.

As important as the executive committee is, it's only one part of the total committee structure. You can't begin to talk about an effective board without talking about committees of the board. They do the bulk of the work of the charter school, thereby freeing the full board for attention to matters like long-range financial planning and policy development.

An effective committee structure helps to increase the involvement of board directors because it gives them an opportunity to use their skills and experience. They provide a training ground for future leaders -- both for individuals who are currently board directors as well as non-board directors who may be asked to serve on the board in the future. They increase the visibility and outreach of the charter school by including non-board directors in committee membership. Committees provide a means for information to flow from the community, clients, and line staff to the board. Committees also give members the chance to freely and discuss issues in an informal setting. Finally, committees serve as excellent problem-solving and decision-making groups because of their small size.

## *Effective Board Committees: The Basics*

### Why Committees Don't Work

Typically committees don't work well for many of the same reasons boards don't function effectively: the lack of long-term agendas, reliance on poor or incomplete information, and the failure to distinguish between board level and operational issues. Therefore committees can benefit from many of the same approaches that make board meetings more effective: an overview by the committee chair at the beginning of each meeting, a strategic focus for discussions, prioritized agendas, annual calendar of committee meetings and major decisions, consent agendas, and evaluation of committee meetings.[2] Refer to Chapter 4 on board decision-making and effective meetings for other ideas to increase the effectiveness of committees.

### Elements Of Committee Effectiveness

There are at least six elements of committee effectiveness:

- **Written Committee Description.** First, there should be a written description of what is expected of each committee to guide the chair and members. The description should summarize the purpose of the committee, its composition and selection procedure, and the specific duties of the committee. There are several sample committee descriptions in the Tool Section of this chapter.

- **An effective committee chair.** The next element is an effective chairperson. In general, the committee chair should a board director. This helps to assure that the leadership of the committee is "in sync" with that of the board as a whole. In seeking an effective chair, we're looking for two things: content knowledge and experience relevant to the work of the committee as well as proven leadership and people skills that will be essential if the committee is to work effectively. Of the two, the most important is leadership and people skills. Additional content knowledge is more easily acquired by a committee chair than the ability to lead others.

  You want a good leader of people and process, someone who feels confident in guiding committee members to accomplish the task in a timely manner. The role of committee chair requires extra work, time for communication with staff, a willingness to resolve conflicts among members, and a commitment to keep the board chair informed at all times[3].

---

[2] Chait, Richard, Holland, Thomas, and Taylor, Barbara, Improving the Performance of Governing Boards, Oryx Press, 1996.
[3] Andringa, Robert C., and Engstrom, Ted W., Nonprofit Board Answer Book, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1997.

There are also some personal characteristics of the effective committee chair that also need to be considered:

- Has confidence in other committee members;
- Wants to release the potential energy of the group;
- Is willing to relinquish some of the chair's formal authority if the job requires it; and
- Is more interested in the committee's success than in his or her own feeling of personal importance.

The good chair is one who can work with people, who can stimulate them rather than brow beat them and can help the group use all the abilities and experiences its members possess and new skills that they develop as they work together.[4]

Depending on the size of the charter school, the committee chair will be responsible for preparing agendas for the meetings, assigning responsibilities to committee members and doing some of the follow-up to make sure assigned work is being done by members. In some instances, charter school staff may be assigned to assist the committee chair but this is not always the case. For a more detailed listing of committee chairperson responsibilities, see the Chairperson Job Description in the tool section of this chapter.[5]

- **Members thoughtfully appointed.** The next element of committee effectiveness is members who have been thoughtfully appointed. Each standing committee is generally composed of a core of five to eight members. They can be a mix of board and non-board directors and should be recruited with the following question in mind: What tasks are the committee responsible for and who among our members and supporters possess the skills and experience needed to complete those tasks? As is the case with other forms of volunteer recruitment, every effort should be made to match the needs and requirements of the committee and the skills, knowledge and interests of prospective committee members. In many cases, prospective board directors, as part of the recruitment process, will be given information about the board committee structure with suggestions on where they might best fit. For example, a prospective board director who has much skill and experience in fund-raising would most likely be asked to serve on the fund development committee. In the end however, regardless of the preferences of board leaders, the individual board directors should be able to select the committee assignment that they feel will best meet their needs, while at the same time, meeting the needs of the charter school. See the Tools Section of this chapter for a sample Committee Preference Form.

- **Accountability to the board.** The next element of committee effectiveness is clear accountability to the board of directors. This begins with the written

---

[4] O'Connell, Brian, Operating Effective Committees, Independent Sector, 1988.
[5] Hirzy, Ellen Cochran, Nonprofit Board Committees, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1993.

committee description that describes what the board expects from the committee. There should also be an effort to link the committee description with relevant strategic plan language. Using the fund development committee as an example, the committee description would reflect a major goal and supporting strategies that address the issue of charter school funding. Under the umbrella of the funding goal and strategies, committee leadership would develop an annual fund-raising strategy and supporting work plan in line with the funding strategic goal. This work plan would contain objectives incorporating measurable outcomes, and these measurable outcomes would be the basis for regular reporting of the committee to the board is a whole. An example of a committee reporting form, "Annual Board Committee Report" that reflects this approach can be found in the Tools Section of this Chapter. Regardless of the approach used, it is important that the charter school board clearly communicate to all of its committees what kind of reporting its expects and with what frequency.

- **Well-run meetings.** The last element of committee effectiveness is well run meetings. In a sense, if a committee reflects the first five indicators of effectiveness -- a clear description of its work, a chair that knows how to lead, a solid match between the interests, skills and experience of individual members on the one hand, and the needs and requirements of the committee on the other, a good mix of board and non-board directors, and direct accountability to the board --we will have the makings of excellent committee meetings. It will still be important to provide for meeting space that matches the needs of the group, a written meeting agenda and any necessary information mailed out to members in advance of the meeting.

In addition, the charter school, as part of the overall board education and training program, should also be prepared to provide training to committee members to help them sharpen their skills.

## Additional Practices to Enhance Committee Effectiveness

### Evaluating Committee Meetings

At the end of each committee meeting, the chair can ask for written or oral comments about the session. In some organizations, this is a feature of every meeting and is referred to as the "check out." A relatively small investment of time can produce continuous improvements in the work of the board's committees. Immediate feedback from members can be solicited on how well the meeting achieved its purposes, if members stayed on task, and if there is anything that can be done to improve effectiveness of future committee meetings. In the Tools Section of this chapter, there are two examples of written committee meeting evaluation forms.

### Annual Committee Calendar Of Major Decisions And Meetings

In Chapter 4, an annual board calendar of major decisions and meetings was suggested. The same practice will increase the effectiveness of the board's committees as well. The committee calendar should also be tied into the overall annual board calendar so that efforts are unified and coordinated for maximum impact. Scheduling regular meetings of the committee in advance will also help busy people plan far enough in advance to assure good attendance. In the Tools Section of this chapter, there is a Sample Annual Board and Committee Calendar.

## Use Of Task Forces And Work Groups

In some instances, the board can replace or supplement standing committees by use of project and issue specific task forces or workgroups. Task forces and workgroups, similar to ad hoc committees, can be used when there is an important, time sensitive assignment that needs to be completed but doesn't require an ongoing standing committee. Task forces can be used to conduct a search for a new charter school administrator, making recommendations on major policy, exploring a major new strategic alliance, planning a capital fund-raising campaign, and other high-priority projects. As with standing committees, it is important that task forces and special workgroups focus on board level projects, and not as a substitute for staff workgroups. At the same time, depending on the work assigned, task forces and special workgroups can include staff, students, parents, and other community leaders in addition to members of the board itself. In general, all of the tools and practices that help standing committees perform effectively, will be useful to task forces and workgroups

## Additional Suggestions

Committee effectiveness can also be enhanced through the following practices:

- Schedule an orientation for new committee members for the same reason new board directors need an orientation before their first board meeting.
- Make sure that committee members receive an agenda in advance of meetings and have all of the information they will need to complete their work.
- Make sure that the chair provides regular and appropriate recognition to active committee members. The chair should also seek out unproductive committee members to find out what is getting in a way of performance and then devising strategies to overcome those barriers.
- Spell out for the committee chairman exactly what the board's expectations are for committee report.
- Encourage the chair to involve committee members in developing the annual committee plan of work and make sure that the committee plans are in alignment with the overall strategic plan of the charter school

# Chapter 10: Tools You Can Use

## *Samples Of Foundation Documents*

- Sample Committee Descriptions (The Center for Public Skills Training)
- Sample Committee Descriptions from ISACS and/or Mosaica Academy Charter School
- Committee Meeting Evaluation Form (Fast Feedback, Chait, page 30)
- Committee Chair Job Description and Committee Member Job Description (Source: Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD)
- Committee Preference Form (can be used with prospective during recruitment and annually with current board directors.)
- Annual Board Committee Report
- Sample Annual Board and Committee Calendar

## *Essential Resources For Effective Committees*

- Hirzy, Ellen Cochran, <u>Nonprofit Board Committees</u>, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1993. The National Center for Nonprofit Boards also publishes booklets on individual committees including Audit, Executive, Nominating, Finance, Fund Development and Planning.
- The National Center for Nonprofit Boards also publishes a series of booklets on specific committees including the executive, nominating, planning, audit committees, and others. Go to <u>www.ncnb.org</u> and click on publications/bookstore link.
- For addition committee description samples, go to the website of the Mosaica Charter School at www.macsbensalem.org/comm.htm. Also visit the website of the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) at http:/www.isacs.org/monographs/bordchrg.html. Additional sample committee descriptions can be found at the website of the Washington Core Knowledge School at http://www.psd.k12.co.us/schools/traut/Charter.html , then scroll down to Section 7 Committees.

# Executive Committee

## General Purpose

The executive committee is commissioned by and responsible to the board of directors to function on behalf of the board of directors in matters of emergency and in interim periods between regularly scheduled board meetings. The executive committee shall have and exercise the authority of the board of directors provided that such authority shall not operate to circumvent the responsibility and authority vested in the board of directors by the by-laws, and any action taken is to be ratified by the board of directors at its first subsequent meeting.

## Appointments and Composition

1. The executive committee shall be composed of the president, vice-President, secretary, and treasurer of the board and one at-large member.

2. The chair of the executive committee shall be the president of the board of directors.

3. The president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and one at-large member shall be elected in accordance with procedures set forth in the by-laws of the charter school.

## Responsibilities

1. Meet to draw up an agenda for meetings of the full board of directors.

2. Make decisions on behalf of the full board as needed which cannot wait for the full board or on matters delegated to the Executive Committee by the board of directors.

3. Maintain effective communication with the committees of the charter school board.

4. Coordinate the annual planning and budget process of the charter school in conjunction with the finance committee and the charter school administrator.

5. Respond to the call of the board president or charter school administrator for emergency meetings to deal with special problems between regular board meetings.

6. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

7. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

8. Report to the board of directors at regular meetings of the board in a manner determined by the board.

# Finance Committee

## *General Purpose*

The finance committee is commissioned by and responsible to the board of Directors. It has the responsibility for working with the charter school administrator to create the upcoming fiscal year budget; presenting budget recommendations to the board; monitor implementation of the approved budget on a regular basis and recommend proposed budget revisions; recommend to the board appropriate policies for the management of the charter school's assets. The finance committee shall be assisted by the charter school administrator.

## *Appointments and Composition*

1. The members of the finance committee shall be the treasurer of the board who shall serve as chair, the president who shall serve as an ex-officio member, together with other directors appointed by the president with the advice and consent of the board in accordance with the by-laws.

## *Responsibilities*

1. Prepare an annual budget for the charter school in collaboration with the charter school administrator.

2. Also in collaboration with the charter school administrator, develop and annually revise a three-year financial forecast and develop long-range financial plans based on the forecast.

2. Review all grant proposals and when necessary, recommend action by the board.

3. Review all non-budgeted expenditures over a set dollar amount to be determined by the Board of Directors and recommend action to the board.

4. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

5. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

6. Arrange for an annual audit with submission of same to the board.

7. Report to the board of directors at regular meetings of the board in a manner determined by the board.

# Personnel Committee

## General Purpose

The personnel committee is commissioned by, and responsible to, the board of directors to assume the responsibility for advising it on matters pertaining to personnel administration and staffing. This responsibility shall, in no way, interfere with the authority of the charter school administrator to hire, supervise and, in accordance with the personnel policies, terminate, the remaining staff of the charter school. The board of directors hires the charter school administrator.

## Appointments and Composition

1. Appointments of the chair and members of the personnel committee shall be made annually by the president of the board with the advice and consent of the Board in accordance with the bylaws.

2. The chair of this committee shall be a member of the board of directors.

3. Other members of this committee shall be members of the board of directors, subject to the conditions stated in the bylaws.

## Responsibilities

1. Provide overall policy guidance for personnel matters in the charter school.

2. Submit, for final approval, recommendations on personnel policy matters to the Executive committee of the board of directors.

3. Provide policy recommendations to the board of directors in the areas of training, employee benefits, employee relations, legal issues relating to employees, recruitment, interviewing, selection procedures, and the like.

4. Annually review the performance of the Charter School Administrator according to the procedures outlined in the Personnel Policies of the organization. (The Charter School Administrator, in turn, is responsible for the annual performance review of other staff.)

5. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

6. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

7. Report to the board of directors on a regular basis in a manner determined by the Board.

# Board Development Committee

## General Purpose

The board development committee is commissioned by and responsible to the board of directors to assume the primary responsibility for matters pertaining to board of director's recruitment, nominations, orientation, training, and evaluation in accordance with the by-laws of the charter school as well as established policies and practices approved by the board of directors.

## Appointments and Composition

1. Appointments of the chair and members of the board development committee shall be made annually by the President of the Board with the advice and consent of the Board in accordance with the Bylaws.

2. The chair of this committee shall be a member of the board of directors.

3. Other members of this committee shall be members of the board of directors, subject to the conditions stated in the bylaws.

## Responsibilities

1. Study the current composition of the board of directors to determine current skills and experience; Identify skills and experience needed on the board.

2. Recruit members to serve as members of the board and develop a slate of directors for consideration by the membership at the annual meeting in accordance with selection/election procedures outlined in the by-laws. Review annually the procedures for board recruitment.

3. Develop an orientation and training plan for new board directors and assist in the planning of the annual board retreat.

4. Assist the executive committee in an annual board self-evaluation.

5. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

6. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

7. Report to the board of directors at regular meetings of the board in a manner determined by the board.

# Resource Development Committee

## General Purpose

The resource development committee is commissioned by and responsible to the board of directors to assume the primary responsibility for raising non-grant funds to meet the budget of the charter school. The board of directors, in consultation with the resource development committee, finance committee and charter school administrator, will determine the fund-raising goal for the resource development committee.

## Appointments and Composition

1. Appointments of the chair and members of the resource development committee shall be made annually by the president of the board with the advice and consent of the board in accordance with the bylaws.

2. The chair of this committee shall be a member of the board of directors.

3. Members of this committee shall be members of the board of directors, subject to the conditions stated in the bylaws. Additional committee members may be appointed and need not be members of the board of directors, subject to the conditions stated in the by-laws.

## Responsibilities

1. Develop an annual fund-raising plan that will generate the funds needed to meet the non-public and non-grant fund-raising goal.

2. Develop the necessary sub-committee systems to successfully carry out the fund-raising events and activities that are part of the annual fund-raising plan; supervise the functions of the sub-committees; develop a plan for involving board directors in the non-grant resource development activities of the charter school.

3. Investigate new resource development projects, activities, and ideas for possible use in the future.

4. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

5. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

6. Report to the board of directors at regular meetings of the board in a manner determined by the board.

# Committee Chair Job Description

1. Is a member of the board.
2. Sets tone for the committee work
3. Ensures that members have the information needed to do their jobs.
4. Oversees the logistics of committee's operations.
5. Reports to the board's chair.
6. Reports to the full board on committee's decisions/recommendations.
7. Works closely with the charter school administrator and other staff as agreed to by the administrator.
8. Assigns work to the committee members, sets the agenda and runs the meetings, and ensures distribution of meeting minutes.
9. Initiates and leads the committee's annual evaluation.

# Committee Member Job Description

1. Regularly attends regular committee meetings and important related meetings.
2. Makes serious commitment to participate actively in committee work.
3. Volunteers for and willingly accepts assignments and completes them thoroughly and on time.
4. Stays informed about committee matters, prepares themselves well for meetings, and reviews and comments on minutes and reports.
5. Gets to know other committee members and builds a collegial working relationship that contributes to consensus.
6. Is an active participant in the committee's annual evaluation and planning efforts.
7. Participates in fund raising for the organization.

(Source: The Management Assistance Program based in St. Paul, MN and Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD.)

# Board Committee Assignments

Please review the committee structure as outlined in the Board Procedures Manual. The board development committee will be reviewing board directors' interest as it pertains to committee assignments and determining appointments to committee positions.

As an aid in this process, we are asking that you complete the form on the following page. After reviewing each committee's general purpose, composition and responsibilities, please select three (3) committees that you would be willing to serve on. You will only be expected to serve on one (1) committee unless you indicate otherwise.

Committees are the important driving force in accomplishing our goals. We are in need of strong committee chairs. The charter school will always assist committee chairs in the development of agendas and distribution of information.

Once committee assignments are in place, we will work together on development of our master calendar for the establishment of all meeting dates for the coming year.

Please complete the form and return to our office no later than
_____.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

# Board Committee Preference Form

Name:

_____

Please list three (3) committees in order of preference that you would be willing to serve on. We will keep committee assignments to a maximum of one (1), unless you specify otherwise.

|                        | WILLING TO CHAIR |      |
| ---------------------- | ---------------- | ---- |
| Committee Selections   | YES              | NO   |

FIRST
PREFERENCE

_____

SECOND
PREFERENCE

_____

THIRD
PREFERENCE

_____

*DO YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS FOR NON-BOARD COMMITTEE MEMBERS:*

1. _____
      NAME                                           COMMITTEE

_____
ORGANIZATION/COMPANY

_____
ADDRESS                                          TELEPHONE #

2. _____

      NAME                                      COMMITTEE

_____

    ORGANIZATION/COMPANY

_____

     ADDRESS                                TELEPHONE #

Other Comments or Suggestions:

_____

_____

# Annual Board Committee Report

Instead of asking board committees only for monthly written reports or having only verbal reports at board meetings, consider asking committee chairs to write an "Annual Report" at the end of each year describing their committees' activities and decisions. These reports can be included with the board minutes in the charter school's formal, permanent records. Here is a simple format that committees can use for an "Annual Report of the Committee":

## Annual Report from Board Committee:
### (NAME)

A summary report on the committee's work this last year, with recommendations to the staff and the full board covering the following points.

1. Committee Name:

2. Period of time this report covers:

3. Committee chair:

4. Committee members:

5. The main objectives for the committee during this past year:

6. Summary of major accomplishments during the last year and current activities:

7. List of activities in progress and upcoming events/discussions:

8. Recommendations to the charter school administrator regarding committee effectiveness:

9. Recommendations to the board of directors regarding committee effectiveness:

10. Other comments/suggestions especially with regard to committee operations, structure and relations with the board as a whole:

| Sample Annual Board and Committee Calendar | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Meeting** | **Jan** | **Feb** | **Mar** | **Apr** | **May** | **June** |
| **Board of Directors** | | | | | | 6/8 8:00 am |
| **Executive Committee** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | 5/4 8:30 am | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Finance Committee** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Personnel Committee** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Board Development Committee** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Resource Devel. Comm.** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Strategic Plan. Comm.** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Monthly Parent Mtg** | 1/14 9:00 am | 2/18 9:00 am | 3/18 9:00 am | 4/15 9:00 am | 5/20 9:00 am | 6/17 9:00 am |

| Sample Annual Board and Committee Calendar | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Meeting** | **July** | **Aug** | **Sept** | **Oct** | **Nov** | **Dec** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Board of Directors** | | 8/10 8:00 am | | 10/2 8:00 am Approve budget | | 12/14 8:00 am |
| **Executive Committee** | 7/13 8:00 am | | 9/14 8:00 am. Quarterly Committee Report Due | | 11/9 8:00 am | Submit annual committee report |
| **Finance Committee** | Begin work on budget with Exec. | | Begin draft budget proposal to Executive Committee. Quarterly Committee Report Due | Bring budget to board for approval | | Submit annual committee report |
| **Personnel Committee** | Perform ED review and salary recommen-dations for 2000 | | Reviews personnel policies; recommen-d ations as needed. Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Submit annual committee report |
| **Board Development Committee** | | | Nomination/ recruitment process activated Quarterly Committee Report Due | Recruitment and orientation as needed | Recruitment and orientation as needed | Recruitment and orientation as needed Submit annual committee report |
| **Resource Devel. Comm.** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Submit annual committee report |
| **Strategic Plan. Comm.** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Submit annual committee report |
| **Parent Mtg.** | 7/15 9:00 am | 8/19 9:00 am | 9/16 9:00 am | 10/21 9:00 am | 11/18 9:00 am | 12/16 9:00 am |

## Types of Committees

In general, there are two types of committees: standing and ad hoc. Standing committees are permanent committees, established in the organization's bylaws that relate to the ongoing governance of the charter school. Ad hoc, or special, committees have limited responsibilities and are created for specific purposes; for example a search committee that manages the search process and recommends a candidate for the charter school administrator position. Ad hoc committees should be instituted for a specific purpose and disbanded when the need for them no longer exists. Ad hoc committees are further discussed later under this chapter under the heading "Use of Task Forces and Work Groups."

## The Committee Structure

In general, the number of committees should be kept to a minimum. The committee structure should be of a sufficient number to enable the board to carry out its governance roles and responsibilities in an efficient and effective manner. Too many committees can create a cumbersome structure and in some cases, can invite micromanagement on the part of the board.

For many charter schools, the standing committee structure will include some or all of the following committees: executive, finance and budget, accountability, board development, and fund-raising. The Executive Committee deserves special attention.

**The Executive Committee.** A critical element in board effectiveness is a functioning executive committee. Generally the executive committee consists of the four executive officers of the Board: the president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. Sometimes other members of the board are included as part of the executive committee: for example chairs of the standing committees or at-large members from the board to assure representation of diverse viewpoints.

It is important to make sure that the use of an executive committee doesn't create an "inner board" consisting of executive committee members, and an "outer board" consisting of those without as much influence and information. Such a development can result in the board not operating together as an effective team. The most positive roles an executive committee can play are to oversee goal setting and agenda development and to serve as a preliminary sounding board for the chair of the board and the charter school administrator. However, the executive committee should not become a substitute for discussion of important matters by the entire board.

For this reason, it is important that the bylaws specify limits on the power of the executive committee if your charter school board chooses to have one. Each school must decide how much authority to grant its executive committee. There is no one's size fits all rule, except the full port must decide what is best for the charter school. Often the executive committee is not permitted to do one or more of the following:

- Amend the articles are bylaws;
- Dissolve the nonprofit corporation (if the school is a separately incorporated nonprofit organization);
- Dismiss or elect new board directors or officers;
- Hire or fire a charter school administrator;
- Enter into or alter major contracts such as the charter contract;
- Sue another entity;
- Change a board approved budget; and
- Adopt or eliminate major programs or services

At its best, the executive committee plays three critical roles: planning the agenda of board meetings, making decisions on behalf of the full board, and serving as a communication link with other members of the board, especially the committee chairs. These roles are described more fully in Chapter 4 of the governance guidebook.

As important as the executive committee is, it's only one part of the total committee structure. You can't begin to talk about an effective board without talking about committees of the board. They do the bulk of the work of the charter school, thereby freeing the full board for attention to matters like long-range financial planning and policy development.

An effective committee structure helps to increase the involvement of board directors because it gives them an opportunity to use their skills and experience. They provide a training ground for future leaders -- both for individuals who are currently board directors as well as non-board directors who may be asked to serve on the board in the future. They increase the visibility and outreach of the charter school by including non-board directors in committee membership. Committees provide a means for information to flow from the community, clients, and line staff to the board. Committees also give members the chance to freely and discuss issues in an informal setting. Finally, committees serve as excellent problem-solving and decision-making groups because of their small size.

# Chapter 10

## The Board at Work: Effective Committees

*Critical Board Building Challenge: How does the board develop and maintain a committee structure that enhances its overall effectiveness?*

## Introduction

Effective committees are, in a word, indispensable. They do the bulk of the work of the charter school board, thereby freeing the full board for attention to matters like responding to emerging critical issues, strategic planning, major policy development and long range financial planning.

An effective committee structure plays the following crucial roles:

- Helps to increase the involvement of board directors because it gives them an opportunity to use their skills and experience.
- Provides a training ground for future leaders -- both for individuals who are currently board directors as well as non-board directors who may be asked to serve on the board in the future.
- Increases the visibility and outreach of the charter school by including non-board directors in committee membership.
- Provides a means for information to flow from the parents, students, community, and charter school staff to the board.
- Gives board directors the chance to discuss emerging issues in some depth.

Board committees operate at the board level, not the staff level. John Carver, author of Boards That Make a Difference, insists that the purpose of board committees is not to help the staff to do its work, but rather to help the board get the work of governance done. Sometimes boards will create committees that are designed to advise the staff, but this arrangement can blur the distinction between board and staff rolls. These committees should be limited or, better still, not created at all. It is important to remember, however, that in some charter schools committees may be involved in day-to-day operations, at least initially[1]. Boards in the earliest stages of charter school development, when there is no staff, clearly must take on what would be staff work in a more fully developed charter school. Once the charter school is beyond its pre-organizing stage, it is important that the boards committees begin to relinquish such involvement in day-to-day operations.

---

[1] Hirzy, Ellen Cochran, Nonprofit Board Committees, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1993.

## Effective Board Committees: The Basics

### Why Committees Don't Work

Typically committees don't work well for many of the same reasons boards don't function effectively: the lack of long-term agendas, reliance on poor or incomplete information, and the failure to distinguish between board level and operational issues. Therefore committees can benefit from many of the same approaches that make board meetings more effective: an overview by the committee chair at the beginning of each meeting, a strategic focus for discussions, prioritized agendas, annual calendar of committee meetings and major decisions, consent agendas, and evaluation of committee meetings.[2] Refer to Chapter 4 on board decision-making and effective meetings for other ideas to increase the effectiveness of committees.

### Elements Of Committee Effectiveness

There are at least six elements of committee effectiveness:

- **Written Committee Description.** First, there should be a written description of what is expected of each committee to guide the chair and members. The description should summarize the purpose of the committee, its composition and selection procedure, and the specific duties of the committee. There are several sample committee descriptions in the Tool Section of this chapter.

- **An effective committee chair.** The next element is an effective chairperson. In general, the committee chair should be a board director. This helps to assure that the leadership of the committee is "in sync" with that of the board as a whole. In seeking an effective chair, we're looking for two things: content knowledge and experience relevant to the work of the committee as well as proven leadership and people skills that will be essential if the committee is to work effectively. Of the two, the most important is leadership and people skills. Additional content knowledge is more easily acquired by a committee chair than the ability to lead others.

  You want a good leader of people and process, someone who feels confident in guiding committee members to accomplish the task in a timely manner. The role of committee chair requires extra work, time for communication with staff, a willingness to resolve conflicts among members, and a commitment to keep the board chair informed at all times[3].

---

[2] Chait, Richard, Holland, Thomas, and Taylor, Barbara, Improving the Performance of Governing Boards, Oryx Press, 1996.
[3] Andringa, Robert C., and Engstrom, Ted W., Nonprofit Board Answer Book, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1997.

There are also some personal characteristics of the effective committee chair that also need to be considered:

- Has confidence in other committee members;
- Wants to release the potential energy of the group;
- Is willing to relinquish some of the chair's formal authority if the job requires it; and
- Is more interested in the committee's success than in his or her own feeling of personal importance.

The good chair is one who can work with people, who can stimulate them rather than brow beat them and can help the group use all the abilities and experiences its members possess and new skills that they develop as they work together.[4]

Depending on the size of the charter school, the committee chair will be responsible for preparing agendas for the meetings, assigning responsibilities to committee members and doing some of the follow-up to make sure assigned work is being done by members. In some instances, charter school staff may be assigned to assist the committee chair but this is not always the case. For a more detailed listing of committee chairperson responsibilities, see the Chairperson Job Description in the tool section of this chapter.[5]

- **Members thoughtfully appointed.** The next element of committee effectiveness is members who have been thoughtfully appointed. Each standing committee is generally composed of a core of five to eight members. They can be a mix of board and non-board directors and should be recruited with the following question in mind: What tasks are the committee responsible for and who among our members and supporters possess the skills and experience needed to complete those tasks? As is the case with other forms of volunteer recruitment, every effort should be made to match the needs and requirements of the committee and the skills, knowledge and interests of prospective committee members. In many cases, prospective board directors, as part of the recruitment process, will be given information about the board committee structure with suggestions on where they might best fit. For example, a prospective board director who has much skill and experience in fund-raising would most likely be asked to serve on the fund development committee. In the end however, regardless of the preferences of board leaders, the individual board directors should be able to select the committee assignment that they feel will best meet their needs, while at the same time, meeting the needs of the charter school. See the Tools Section of this chapter for a sample Committee Preference Form.

- **Accountability to the board.** The next element of committee effectiveness is clear accountability to the board of directors. This begins with the written

---

[4] O'Connell, Brian, Operating Effective Committees, Independent Sector, 1988.
[5] Hirzy, Ellen Cochran, Nonprofit Board Committees, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1993.

committee description that describes what the board expects from the committee. There should also be an effort to link the committee description with relevant strategic plan language. Using the fund development committee as an example, the committee description would reflect a major goal and supporting strategies that address the issue of charter school funding. Under the umbrella of the funding goal and strategies, committee leadership would develop an annual fund-raising strategy and supporting work plan in line with the funding strategic goal. This work plan would contain objectives incorporating measurable outcomes, and these measurable outcomes would be the basis for regular reporting of the committee to the board as a whole. An example of a committee reporting form, "Annual Board Committee Report" that reflects this approach can be found in the Tools Section of this Chapter. Regardless of the approach used, it is important that the charter school board clearly communicates to all of its committees what kind of reporting it expects and with what frequency.

- **Well-run meetings.** The last element of committee effectiveness is well run meetings. In a sense, if a committee reflects the first five indicators of effectiveness -- a clear description of its work, a chair that knows how to lead, a solid match between the interests, skills and experience of individual members on the one hand, and the needs and requirements of the committee on the other, a good mix of board and non-board directors, and direct accountability to the board --we will have the makings of excellent committee meetings. It will still be important to provide for meeting space that matches the needs of the group, a written meeting agenda and any necessary information mailed out to members in advance of the meeting.

In addition, the charter school, as part of the overall board education and training program, should also be prepared to provide training to committee members to help them sharpen their skills.


## *Additional Practices to Enhance Committee Effectiveness*

### Evaluating Committee Meetings

At the end of each committee meeting, the chair can ask for written or oral comments about the session. In some organizations, this is a feature of every meeting and is referred to as the "check out." A relatively small investment of time can produce continuous improvements in the work of the board's committees. Immediate feedback from members can be solicited on how well the meeting achieved its purposes, if members stayed on task, and if there is anything that can be done to improve effectiveness of future committee meetings. In the Tools Section of this chapter, there are two examples of written committee meeting evaluation forms.


### Annual Committee Calendar Of Major Decisions And Meetings

In Chapter 4, an annual board calendar of major decisions and meetings was suggested. The same practice will increase the effectiveness of the board's committees as well. The committee calendar should also be tied into the overall annual board calendar so that efforts are unified and coordinated for maximum impact. Scheduling regular meetings of the committee in advance will also help busy people plan far enough in advance to assure good attendance. In the Tools Section of this chapter, there is a Sample Annual Board and Committee Calendar.

## Use Of Task Forces And Work Groups

In some instances, the board can replace or supplement standing committees by use of project and issue specific task forces or workgroups. Task forces and workgroups, similar to ad hoc committees, can be used when there is an important, time sensitive assignment that needs to be completed but doesn't require an ongoing standing committee. Task forces can be used to conduct a search for a new charter school administrator, making recommendations on major policy, exploring a major new strategic alliance, planning a capital fund-raising campaign, and other high-priority projects. As with standing committees, it is important that task forces and special workgroups focus on board level projects, and not as a substitute for staff workgroups. At the same time, depending on the work assigned, task forces and special workgroups can include staff, students, parents, and other community leaders in addition to members of the board itself. In general, all of the tools and practices that help standing committees perform effectively, will be useful to task forces and workgroups

## Additional Suggestions

Committee effectiveness can also be enhanced through the following practices:

- Schedule an orientation for new committee members for the same reason new board directors need an orientation before their first board meeting.
- Make sure that committee members receive an agenda in advance of meetings and have all of the information they will need to complete their work.
- Make sure that the chair provides regular and appropriate recognition to active committee members. The chair should also seek out unproductive committee members to find out what is getting in the way of performance and then devising strategies to overcome those barriers.
- Spell out for the committee chairman exactly what the board's expectations are for committee reports.
- Encourage the chair to involve committee members in developing the annual committee plan of work and make sure that the committee plans are in alignment with the overall strategic plan of the charter school

# Chapter 10: Tools You Can Use

## *Samples Of Foundation Documents*

- Sample Committee Descriptions (The Center for Public Skills Training)
- Sample Committee Descriptions from ISACS and/or Mosaica Academy Charter School
- Committee Meeting Evaluation Form (Fast Feedback, Chait, page 30)
- Committee Chair Job Description and Committee Member Job Description (Source: Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD)
- Committee Preference Form (can be used with prospective during recruitment and annually with current board directors.)
- Annual Board Committee Report
- Sample Annual Board and Committee Calendar

## *Essential Resources For Effective Committees*

- Hirzy, Ellen Cochran, <u>Nonprofit Board Committees</u>, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1993. The National Center for Nonprofit Boards also publishes booklets on individual committees including Audit, Executive, Nominating, Finance, Fund Development and Planning.
- The National Center for Nonprofit Boards also publishes a series of booklets on specific committees including the executive, nominating, planning, audit committees, and others. Go to <u>www.ncnb.org</u> and click on publications/bookstore link.
- For additional committee description samples, go to the website of the Mosaica Charter School at www.macsbensalem.org/comm.htm. Also visit the website of the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) at http:/www.isacs.org/monographs/bordchrg.html. Additional sample committee descriptions can be found at the website of the Washington Core Knowledge School at http://www.psd.k12.co.us/schools/traut/Charter.html , then scroll down to Section 7 Committees.

# Executive Committee

## General Purpose

The executive committee is commissioned by and responsible to the board of directors to function on behalf of the board of directors in matters of emergency and in interim periods between regularly scheduled board meetings. The executive committee shall have and exercise the authority of the board of directors provided that such authority shall not operate to circumvent the responsibility and authority vested in the board of directors by the by-laws, and any action taken is to be ratified by the board of directors at its first subsequent meeting.

## Appointments and Composition

1. The executive committee shall be composed of the president, vice-President, secretary, and treasurer of the board and one at-large member.

2. The chair of the executive committee shall be the president of the board of directors.

3. The president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and one at-large member shall be elected in accordance with procedures set forth in the by-laws of the charter school.

## Responsibilities

1. Meet to draw up an agenda for meetings of the full board of directors.

2. Make decisions on behalf of the full board as needed which cannot wait for the full board or on matters delegated to the Executive Committee by the board of directors.

3. Maintain effective communication with the committees of the charter school board.

4. Coordinate the annual planning and budget process of the charter school in conjunction with the finance committee and the charter school administrator.

5. Respond to the call of the board president or charter school administrator for emergency meetings to deal with special problems between regular board meetings.

6. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

7. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

8. Report to the board of directors at regular meetings of the board in a manner determined by the board.

# Finance Committee

## General Purpose

The finance committee is commissioned by and responsible to the board of Directors. It has the responsibility for working with the charter school administrator to create the upcoming fiscal year budget; presenting budget recommendations to the board; monitor implementation of the approved budget on a regular basis and recommend proposed budget revisions; recommend to the board appropriate policies for the management of the charter school's assets. The finance committee shall be assisted by the charter school administrator.

## Appointments and Composition

1. The members of the finance committee shall be the treasurer of the board who shall serve as chair, the president who shall serve as an ex-officio member, together with other directors appointed by the president with the advice and consent of the board in accordance with the by-laws.

## Responsibilities

1. Prepare an annual budget for the charter school in collaboration with the charter school administrator.

2. Also in collaboration with the charter school administrator, develop and annually revise a three-year financial forecast and develop long-range financial plans based on the forecast.

2. Review all grant proposals and when necessary, recommend action by the board.

3. Review all non-budgeted expenditures over a set dollar amount to be determined by the Board of Directors and recommend action to the board.

4. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

5. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

6. Arrange for an annual audit with submission of same to the board.

7. Report to the board of directors at regular meetings of the board in a manner determined by the board.

# Personnel Committee

## General Purpose

The personnel committee is commissioned by, and responsible to, the board of directors to assume the responsibility for advising it on matters pertaining to personnel administration and staffing. This responsibility shall, in no way, interfere with the authority of the charter school administrator to hire, supervise and, in accordance with the personnel policies, terminate, the remaining staff of the charter school. The board of directors hires the charter school administrator.

## Appointments and Composition

1. Appointments of the chair and members of the personnel committee shall be made annually by the president of the board with the advice and consent of the Board in accordance with the bylaws.

2. The chair of this committee shall be a member of the board of directors.

3. Other members of this committee shall be members of the board of directors, subject to the conditions stated in the bylaws.

## Responsibilities

1. Provide overall policy guidance for personnel matters in the charter school.

2. Submit, for final approval, recommendations on personnel policy matters to the Executive committee of the board of directors.

3. Provide policy recommendations to the board of directors in the areas of training, employee benefits, employee relations, legal issues relating to employees, recruitment, interviewing, selection procedures, and the like.

4. Annually review the performance of the Charter School Administrator according to the procedures outlined in the Personnel Policies of the organization. (The Charter School Administrator, in turn, is responsible for the annual performance review of other staff.)

5. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

6. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

7. Report to the board of directors on a regular basis in a manner determined by the Board.

# Board Development Committee

## General Purpose

The board development committee is commissioned by and responsible to the board of directors to assume the primary responsibility for matters pertaining to board of director's recruitment, nominations, orientation, training, and evaluation in accordance with the by-laws of the charter school as well as established policies and practices approved by the board of directors.

## Appointments and Composition

1. Appointments of the chair and members of the board development committee shall be made annually by the President of the Board with the advice and consent of the Board in accordance with the Bylaws.

2. The chair of this committee shall be a member of the board of directors.

3. Other members of this committee shall be members of the board of directors, subject to the conditions stated in the bylaws.

## Responsibilities

1. Study the current composition of the board of directors to determine current skills and experience; Identify skills and experience needed on the board.

2. Recruit members to serve as members of the board and develop a slate of directors for consideration by the membership at the annual meeting in accordance with selection/election procedures outlined in the by-laws. Review annually the procedures for board recruitment.

3. Develop an orientation and training plan for new board directors and assist in the planning of the annual board retreat.

4. Assist the executive committee in an annual board self-evaluation.

5. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

6. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

7. Report to the board of directors at regular meetings of the board in a manner determined by the board.

# Resource Development Committee

## *General Purpose*

The resource development committee is commissioned by and responsible to the board of directors to assume the primary responsibility for raising non-grant funds to meet the budget of the charter school. The board of directors, in consultation with the resource development committee, finance committee and charter school administrator, will determine the fund-raising goal for the resource development committee.

## *Appointments and Composition*

1. Appointments of the chair and members of the resource development committee shall be made annually by the president of the board with the advice and consent of the board in accordance with the bylaws.

2. The chair of this committee shall be a member of the board of directors.

3. Members of this committee shall be members of the board of directors, subject to the conditions stated in the bylaws. Additional committee members may be appointed and need not be members of the board of directors, subject to the conditions stated in the by-laws.

## *Responsibilities*

1. Develop an annual fund-raising plan that will generate the funds needed to meet the non-public and non-grant fund-raising goal.

2. Develop the necessary sub-committee systems to successfully carry out the fund-raising events and activities that are part of the annual fund-raising plan; supervise the functions of the sub-committees; develop a plan for involving board directors in the non-grant resource development activities of the charter school.

3. Investigate new resource development projects, activities, and ideas for possible use in the future.

4. Annually submit objectives as part of the planning and budgeting process.

5. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the board of directors.

6. Report to the board of directors at regular meetings of the board in a manner determined by the board.

# Committee Chair Job Description

1. Is a member of the board.
2. Sets tone for the committee work
3. Ensures that members have the information needed to do their jobs.
4. Oversees the logistics of committees operations.
5. Reports to the board's chair.
6. Reports to the full board on committee's decisions/recommendations.
7. Works closely with the charter school administrator and other staff as agreed to by the administrator.
8. Assigns work to the committee members, sets the agenda and runs the meetings, and ensures distribution of meeting minutes.
9. Initiates and leads the committee's annual evaluation.


# Committee Member Job Description

1. Regularly attends regular committee meetings and important related meetings.
2. Makes serious commitment to participate actively in committee work.
3. Volunteers for and willingly accepts assignments and completes them thoroughly and on time.
4. Stays informed about committee matters, prepares themselves well for meetings, and reviews and comments on minutes and reports.
5. Gets to know other committee members and builds a collegial working relationship that contributes to consensus.
6. Is an active participant in the committee's annual evaluation and planning efforts.
7. Participates in fund raising for the organization.

(Source: The Management Assistance Program based in St. Paul, MN and Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD.)

# Board Committee Assignments

Please review the committee structure as outlined in the Board Procedures Manual. The board development committee will be reviewing board directors' interest as it pertains to committee assignments and determining appointments to committee positions.

As an aid in this process, we are asking that you complete the form on the following page. After reviewing each committee's general purpose, composition and responsibilities, please select three (3) committees that you would be willing to serve on. You will only be expected to serve on one (1) committee unless you indicate otherwise.

Committees are the important driving force in accomplishing our goals. We are in need of strong committee chairs. The charter school will always assist committee chairs in the development of agendas and distribution of information.

Once committee assignments are in place, we will work together on development of our master calendar for the establishment of all meeting dates for the coming year.

Please complete the form and return to our office no later than

_____.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

# Board Committee Preference Form

Name:

_____

Please list three (3) committees in order of preference that you would be willing to serve
on. We will keep committee assignments to a maximum of one (1), unless you specify
otherwise.

<u>WILLING TO CHAIR</u>

<u>Committee Selections</u>       YES  NO

FIRST PREFERENCE:

_____

SECOND PREFERENCE:

_____

THIRD PREFERENCE:

_____

*DO YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS FOR NON-BOARD COMMITTEE MEMBERS:*

1. _____
  NAME           COMMITTEE

_____
ORGANIZATION/COMPANY

_____
  ADDRESS         TELEPHONE #

2. _____

     NAME                                       COMMITTEE

_____

     ORGANIZATION/COMPANY

_____

     ADDRESS                                  TELEPHONE #

Other Comments or Suggestions:

_____

_____

# Annual Board Committee Report

Instead of asking board committees only for monthly written reports or having only verbal reports at board meetings, consider asking committee chairs to write an "Annual Report" at the end of each year describing their committees' activities and decisions. These reports can be included with the board minutes in the charter school's formal, permanent records. Here is a simple format that committees can use for an "Annual Report of the Committee":

## Annual Report from Board Committee: _____

### (NAME)

A summary report on the committee's work this last year, with recommendations to the staff and the full board covering the following points.

1. Committee Name:

2. Period of time this report covers:

3. Committee chair:

4. Committee members:

5. The main objectives for the committee during this past year:

6. Summary of major accomplishments during the last year and current activities:

7. List of activities in progress and upcoming events/discussions:

8. Recommendations to the charter school administrator regarding committee effectiveness:

9. Recommendations to the board of directors regarding committee effectiveness:

10. Other comments/suggestions especially with regard to committee operations, structure and relations with the board as a whole:

# Sample Annual Board and Committee Calendar

| Meeting | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Board of Directors** | | | | | | 6/8<br>8:00 am |
| **Executive Committee** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | 5/4<br>8:30 am | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Finance Committee** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Personnel Committee** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Board Development Committee** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Resource Devel. Comm.** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Strategic Plan. Comm.** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due |
| **Monthly Parent Mtg** | 1/14<br>9:00 am | 2/18<br>9:00 am | 3/18<br>9:00 am | 4/15<br>9:00 am | 5/20<br>9:00 am | 6/17<br>9:00 am |

# Sample Annual Board and Committee Calendar

| Meeting | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Board of Directors** | | 8/10 8:00 am | | 10/2 8:00 am Approve budget | | 12/14 8:00 am |
| **Executive Committee** | 7/13 8:00 am | | 9/14 8:00 am. Quarterly Committee Report Due | | 11/9 8:00 am | Submit annual committee report |
| **Finance Committee** | Begin work on budget with Exec. | | Begin draft budget proposal to Executive Committee. Quarterly Committee Report Due | Bring budget to board for approval | | Submit annual committee report |
| **Personnel Committee** | Perform ED review and salary recommen-dations for 2000 | | Reviews personnel policies; recommen-d ations as needed. Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Submit annual committee report |
| **Board Development Committee** | | | Nomination/ recruitment process activated Quarterly Committee Report Due | Recruitment and orientation as needed | Recruitment and orientation as needed | Recruitment and orientation as needed Submit annual committee report |
| **Resource Devel. Comm.** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Submit annual committee report |
| **Strategic Plan. Comm.** | | | Quarterly Committee Report Due | | | Submit annual committee report |
| **Parent Mtg.** | 7/15 9:00 am | 8/19 9:00 am | 9/16 9:00 am | 10/21 9:00 am | 11/18 9:00 am | 12/16 9:00 am |

# Effective Board and Superintendent Collaboration
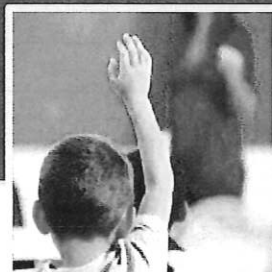
In the following report, Hanover Research reviews literature on effective strategies for establishing strong relations between school boards and their superintendents, as well as general best practices for school board governance.

HR HANOVER RESEARCH

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

## INTRODUCTION

In the following report, Hanover Research presents a comprehensive account of literature addressing the components of effective superintendent and school board relationships. The report also highlights effective strategies for board governance, focusing on school boards' impact on student achievement, practices specific to urban districts, and techniques for overcoming political barriers.

## KEY FINDINGS

The following points summarize the key findings found within the body of the report:

- **A strong, effective relationship between superintendents and school board members hinges upon clear definitions of each body's duties and responsibilities.** Confusion over roles, most often due to board members overstepping their boundaries by meddling in administrative affairs, can cause inefficiency and conflict. Successful districts require board members to focus on long-term strategic planning and superintendents to focus on successfully implementing policy.

- **Successful board/superintendent collaboration requires frequent, diplomatic communication both in and out of official settings.** To ensure the timely fulfillment of strategic plans, school boards should conduct frequent, informal superintendent "check-ups," as well as extensive formal evaluations. The board should recognize these meetings as more than simply a time to critique the superintendent, and should use the opportunity to self-evaluate and review district performance data.

- **Board members often enter their terms with limited knowledge of the exact nature of the superintendent's administrative role, leading to role confusion and preconceived notions of a superintendent's abilities.** This initial period of unfamiliarity can cause tension between board members and superintendents, but can be avoided through extensive board member onboarding and continuous professional development.

- **While underperforming urban school district boards and superintendents face many of the same problems that other districts encounter, the extensive nature of reform required in these districts poses several leadership challenges.** The length of urban district reform initiatives extends beyond usual board member terms. Urban districts can ensure policy longevity despite board turnover by building strong community relations and resident buy-in. By convincing community leaders to support a reform, a district can help ensure that community members will continue to elect pro-reform board members.

- **Politics at the board and superintendent level plague all school districts.** When school boards fail to act as a singular voice, and specific members become mavericks or "lone rangers" who appease special interest factions rather than the public at large, student achievement suffers. In such a system, superintendents are forced to dilute their potentially-successful policy recommendations in order to gain acceptance by a board with questionable intentions. Thus, the literature suggests that board members should use student achievement as the primary barometer for policy decisions.

# SECTION I: BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONS

A significant portion of a school district's success depends, undoubtedly, on the performance of its board and superintendent; however, these legislative and executive bodies cannot be evaluated in separate vacuums. Several studies have examined the dynamic between superintendents and school boards, and most conclude that a positive relationship between these two parties ultimately drives the successful governance of a district.[1]

Given the clear importance of school board and superintendent relations, this section explores the best practices used by districts to establish collaborative, effective relationships and governance structures. While Hanover draws on a wide body of literature to inform the content presented here, the section's structure is loosely adapted from the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB), a key organization within one of the first states to recognize the link between effective board governance, collaboration, and student achievement. Recently, in conjunction with the School Administrators of Iowa, the IASB surveyed successful board members and administrators, identifying five key principles for positive board and superintendent relations:[2]

- **Principle 1:** Clarify roles and expectations for board members and superintendent.

- **Principle 2:** Establish and implement a clear process for communication between board members and administration.

- **Principle 3:** Actively work to build trust and mutual respect between the board and administrative team.

- **Principle 4:** Evaluate the whole team.

- **Principle 5:** Actively work on improved decision-making.

As current research largely advances these broad principles, the discussion to follow adheres to this framework, with more specific trends drawn from the literature to support each principle.

---

[1] Alsbury, T. "Hitting a Moving Target: How Politics Determines the Changing Roles of Superintendents and School Boards," p. 134. In *Handbook of Education Politics and Policy*. Eds. Bruce S. Cooper, James G. Cibulka, and Lance D. Fusarelli. Routledge: 2008. Retrieved via Google Books.

[2] Bulleted points quoted from: "Principles for Positive Board and Superintendent Relations." Iowa Association of School Boards. http://www.ia-sb.org/BoardOperations.aspx?id=1060

## ESTABLISHING CLEAR ROLES

Researchers widely acknowledge the importance of clearly delineating duties and responsibilities among superintendents and school board members. Traditional conceptions of these two governing bodies hold that a board's domain lies in policy *creation*, while the responsibility of the superintendent and his or her administrative team is strictly policy *implementation*.[3] However, these roles have grown increasingly amorphous and disparate across districts in recent years. Superintendents are no longer simply tasked with school management; their duties have expanded into areas of specialization and accountability, including student learning outcomes. Many cite this phenomenon as a shift in the traditional superintendency away from school management and toward "transformation leadership," an approach entrenched in strategy and heavily focused on long-term student learning outcomes.[4] Simultaneously, school boards nationwide are venturing outside of their state- and district-defined roles of strategy, leadership, and policy development, with many members delving into administrative and day-to-day specifics, as well as advancing political motivations.[5] The confusion, inefficiency, and conflict caused by these blurred lines can ultimately prove detrimental to the success of a school district.

### SYMPTOMS AND CAUSES OF ROLE CONFUSION

Role confusion between school boards and superintendents occurs when the two parties encroach on each other's responsibilities, reducing district efficiency, inhibiting necessary strategic planning, and causing tension. The most common type of role confusion in districts involves superintendents focusing too heavily on policy and school boards extending too far into administrative functions.[6] According to Caruso, role confusion is often exacerbated by a single "lone ranger"—a board member who becomes unnecessarily involved in day-to-day operations and personnel issues by circumventing the superintendent's authority, meeting secretly with staff members, and applying inappropriate amounts of pressure on other board members and staff. Caruso warns that this outlier behavior can drastically reduce a board's ability to collaborate and effectively govern.[7]

[3] Price, W. 2001. "Policy Governance Revisited." *School Administrator,* 58, pp. 46-48 &
  Kowalski, T.J. 2006. *The School Superintendent: Theory, Practice, and Cases.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Both cited in Nelson, M. "An Exploration of School Board-Superintendent Relationships in Minnesota," pp. 10-11. Minnesota Association of School Administrations, October 5, 2010.
  http://www.mnasa.org/cms/lib6/MN07001305/Centricity/Domain/28/mnelson_FINAL_REPORT_OF_STUDY_FIND INGS_DOCUMENT.Oct5.2010.pdf
[4] Thompson, R., Templeton, N., Ballenger, J. "School Board Presidents and Superintendents' Use of Transformational Leadership to Improve Student Outcomes." *National Forum of Education Administration and Supervision Journal,* Volume 30, Number 4, 2013. p. 1.
  http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Thompson,%20Ray%20School%20Board%20P residents%20NFEASJ%20V30%20N4%202013.pdf; See also Hoyle, J. R., Bjork, L. G., Collier, V., & Glass, T. 2005. *The Superintendent as CEO.* Thousand Oaks, California: AASA and Corwin Press.
[5] Kowalski, T. J., Op. cit., p. 126. Retrieved from GoogleBooks.
[6] Ibid., pp. 144-145.
[7] Caruso, N. 2005. "The Lone Ranger on the Board." *School Administrator,* 62, pp. 8-9. Cited in Nelson, M., Op. cit.

McCurdy also identifies key behaviors that can cause—or, alternatively, prevent—role confusion, outlining the difference between board members who function as trustees and those who function as delegates:

- Fulfilling the *trustee role*, board members act rationally to serve broad public interests.

- Conversely, those acting as *delegates* protect personal interests and the interests of factional special-interest groups supporting them.

Trustees typically make independent judgments regarding a superintendent's policy recommendations, remaining as objective as possible. Their decisions ultimately demonstrate a concern for the entire community the district serves. However, delegates project political judgments onto superintendents' recommendations. More often than not, unpredictable board members fluctuate between these two roles, depending on the issue at hand.[8] Such motivations can lead board members to misunderstand their actual roles in the district.

> *The most common types of role confusion in districts involve superintendents focusing too heavily on policy and school boards extending too far into administrative functions.*

Researchers have identified several other possible causes for role confusion between superintendents and school boards. Linda J. Dawson and Dr. Randy Quinn, researchers with the Aspen Group, a governance consulting company for public and non-profit boards, argue that role confusion occurs when boards and superintendents share decision-making at the operational level. In a 2000 study published in *The School Administrator*, Dawson and Quinn assert that the governance processes outlined in most boards' policy handbooks actually *cause* role confusion. After analyzing a large sample of boards, they found that many policies focus more on operational concerns than on governance, further institutionalizing role confusion. Dawson and Quinn note, "The board indeed can control all employees through policy, but it must do so through its only direct employee, the superintendent."[9]

Role confusion can often be partially attributed to the expectations that many board members bring to their term regarding a superintendent's performance and function. Kowalski notes that board members often lack experience in school administration, leading them to perceive superintendent behavior through the lens of their own personal convictions.[10] Among other sentiments, board members often express the following opinions of their superintendents: that they lack respect for board members; that they lack integrity; that they fail to manage; that they are inaccessible; and that they fail to comply

---

[8] McCurdy, J. "Building Better Board-Administrator Relations." American Association of School Administrators, January 1, 1993. Cited in Kowalski, T. J.,  Op. cit. Also cited in Nelson, M., Op. cit.

[9] Dawson, L. and Quinn, R. 2000. "Clarifying Board and Superintendent Roles," p. 2. American Association of School Administrators.
   http://www.aspengroup.org/upl/aspen/clarifying_board_and_superintendent_roles_2003_02.pdf

[10] Kowalski, T. J., Op. cit., p. 156.

with moral standards.[11] By entering their terms with these preconceived notions, board members are likely to grow combative, rather than collaborative, and ultimately infringe on their superintendent's duties.

The political nature of elected school boards is also commonly cited as a main cause of role confusion. Under a traditional model, school boards function as an authority that benefits the community as a whole, with members functioning as statespersons who strive for objective, effective policy decisions.[12] In reality, factional pressures and personal biases cause many individual board members to overstep the boundaries of their roles and attempt to meddle in administrative specifics. Increased transparency and visibility of the role, brought on by developments such as the broadcasting of school board meetings, can actually worsen this problem, as board members may feel increased pressured to appease specific groups within the community.[13]

## SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF ROLE CONFUSION

Several general techniques and approaches may be used to avoid issues associated with role confusion. One solution, proposed by scholar Deborah Lands, involves holding school boards accountable for raising student achievement. Donald McAdams, Chairman and Founder of the Center for Reform of School Systems, similarly argues that placing all of the responsibility for raising student achievement with the superintendent is ineffective and sets the executive branch up for failure. Instead, McAdams encourages board members to set student achievement priorities and plan district structures to support the superintendent in reaching those goals. This form of collaboration keeps boards focused on strategy and, according to McAdams, also helps reduce superintendent turnover, a major inhibitor to district performance.[14]

The results from a collaborative research effort of the National School Boards Association, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the Iowa School Boards Foundation, and the Wallace Foundation, published in 2010, suggest that school boards vary in the degree to which they establish specific goals, as opposed to broad expectations. Based on a survey of 900 board members and 120 superintendents nationwide, the study found that 28.6 percent of superintendents reported that their school boards "set broad expectations and leave it to the professionals to determine specific goals," while 34.5 percent conversely noted that their school boards set *specific* student achievement goals. The responses of school board members demonstrated a similar breakdown, with districts relatively split on the specificity of goal-setting.[15]

---

[11] Ibid.

[12] Kowalski, T. J., Op. cit., p. 124. Cited in Nelson, M., Op. cit., p. 12.

[13] Ibid.

[14] See "Effective Superintendents, Effective Boards: Finding the Right Fit," p. 7. Education Writers Association, 2003. http://www.ewa.org/docs/leadership.pdf

[15] Hess, F.M. and O. Meeks. "Governance in the Accountability Era." 2010. p. 30. Published by the National School Boards Association, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, and the Iowa School Boards Foundation. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED515849.pdf

To combat role confusion, districts must lay out of clear responsibilities for governance bodies. In their report published in 2000, Richard Goodman and William Zimmerman comprehensively outline the responsibilities of school boards, superintendents, and board/superintendent teams. Figure 1.1, on the following page, lists the outlined duties for board/superintendent teams.

The broad view of shared responsibilities offered in Figure 1.1 shows that these two branches are generally expected to collaborate on long-term planning and strategy regarding student achievement. Not included in Figure 1.1 is Goodman and Zimmerman's outline for board-specific responsibilities. The scholars exclude from that list administrative responsibilities such as the management of business and financial matters, bids and contracts, facilities, and personnel. Those powers are explicitly granted to superintendents.[16] While Goodman and Zimmerman argue that these responsibilities should be incorporated into state law, districts may still choose to individually adopt the delineated responsibilities and repeatedly reference them to ensure that board members and superintendents do not confuse their roles.

**Figure 1.1: Responsibilities of Board/Superintendent Teams**

| RESPONSIBILITY |
| --- |
| • Having as its top priority the creation of teamwork and advocacy for the high achievement and healthy development of all children in the community |
| • Providing education leadership for the community, including the development and implementation of the community vision and long range plan, in close collaboration with principals, teachers, other staff and parents |
| • Creating strong linkages with social service, health, and other community organizations and agencies to provide community wide support and services for healthy development and high achievement for children |
| • Setting district-wide policies and annual goals, tied directly to the community's vision and long-range plan for education |
| • Approving an annual school district budget, developed by the superintendent and adopted by the board |
| • Ensuring the safety and adequacy of all school facilities |
| • Providing resources for the professional development of teachers, principals and other staff |
| • Periodically evaluating its own leadership, governance, and teamwork for children |
| • Overseeing negotiation with employee groups |

Source: Goodman and Zimmerman[17]

---

[16] "Effective Superintendents, Effective Boards: Finding the Right Fit," Op. cit., p. 7.

[17] Goodman, R. and Zimmerman, W., "Thinking Differently: Recommendations for 21st Century School Board/Superintendent Leadership, Governance, and Teamwork for High Student Achievement," Educational Research Service and New England School Development Council, 2000. Cited in "Effective Superintendents, Effective Boards: Finding the Right Fit," Op. cit., p. 9.

## BUILDING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

While clearly-defined roles ensure that school districts properly divide labor for the advancement of student achievement, research also shows that these two bodies cannot carry out tasks in isolation. Successful governance requires effective collaboration, which hinges upon strong communication skills and, at times, policies.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG SUPERINTENDENT/BOARD COMMUNICATION

Research on the dynamics between superintendents and school boards unanimously agrees that effective communication contributes significantly to successful governance. Peterson and Short argue that a superintendent/board relationship built on strong communication skills influences school board decision-making more than any other factor.[18] Kowalski adds that a superintendent should, first and foremost, be an "expert communicator."[19]

Regardless of the specific practices behind "good communication," it is clear that communication between boards and superintendents is often insufficient. A five-year survey conducted by the American Association of School Administrators shows that most superintendents (62 percent) "spend three hours or less per week in direct communication with board members."[20] This tendency to delay communication until board meetings increases the likelihood that goals will diverge or priorities will shift in opposite directions.

With agreement on the importance of communication, school boards and superintendents can carry out several active measures to maintain a healthy level of dialogue. As shown in Figure 1.2, David Else, Director of the Institute for Educational Leadership at the University of Northern Iowa, lays out several of these strategies.

**Figure 1.2: Best Practices for Superintendent and Board of Education Communication**

| STRATEGIES |
|---|
| • Establishing a clear, well-defined system for the events and procedures that take place during a board meeting |
| • Creating a workshop system to bring all board members up-to-speed on issues relevant to their decision making responsibilities |
| • Establishing a routinized strategic planning system for developing short and long term goals |
| • Setting up a communications system for special issues that may arise such as school closings and boundary realignment |
| • Creating a crisis information system that quickly provides communication to board members in the event of an emergency |
| • Nurturing an informal cabinet of additional official contacts between board members and superintendents to build a trustworthy support system for both parties to share |

Source: David Else, UNI[21]

---

[18] Peterson and Short, 2002. Cited in Alsbury, T., Op. cit., p. 134.

[19] Kowalski, T. J. "Evolution of the school superintendent as communicator," *Communication Education*, 54(2), 101-117, 2005. Cited in Alsbury, T., Op. cit., p. 134.

[20] Alsbury, T., Op. cit., p. 134.

[21] Else, D., "Strengthening Board of Education / Superintendent Relationships in America's Schools," University of Northern Iowa Institute for Educational Research, 1993. http://www.uni.edu/coe/iel/monographs/bs.html

## MONITORING RELATIONSHIPS

While many school boards and superintendents make commendable efforts to communicate frequently and efficiently, positive relationships can dissolve as quickly as they crop up. In order to prevent the deterioration of strong communication channels and overall diplomacy, Kowalski recommends that boards and superintendents carefully monitor their relationships. In its simplest form, this involves frequent, informal check-ups between board members and superintendents during which grievances are expressed and addressed.[22] In a more extreme measure, relationships can be monitored and re-aligned through board and superintendent retreats that allow both parties to focus on broader strategy instead of time-consuming, day-to-day issues. An effective starting point for conversations intended to monitor and strengthen relationships may involve board member and superintendent self-evaluations. The conversations that result should not replace formal evaluations, but instead improve overall communication and prevent latent issues from blocking district progress over time.

> *A five-year survey by the AASA shows that 62 percent of superintendents "spend three hours or less per week in direct communication with board members."*

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES

Despite efforts to communicate effectively, most school boards and superintendents will experience periods of significant conflict during their time in office. However, research shows that not *all* conflict between boards and superintendents is necessarily destructive. An understanding of the alternative underscores this point. Alsbury finds that, because superintendents are vulnerable to termination by the school board, they rarely criticize or strongly demand much of the board.[23] In fact, many superintendents admit to frequently modifying their recommendations to much less effective compromises in order to gain board approval.[24] Political barriers to healthy conflict may ultimately prevent the policies most pertinent to academic achievement from being implemented. Thus, some debate between school boards and superintendents is called for.

On the other end of the spectrum, too much conflict, or conflict perceived by the public as hostile or motivated by factors outside educational goals (e.g., reducing another party's resources, damaging someone else's reputation), can prove destructive for a district. Thus, superintendents and boards should work to keep any conflict that arises distanced from personal issues and focused on the success of the district. Research finds that responsibility

---

[22] Kowalski, T. J., Op. cit., p. 153.
[23] Alsbury, T., Op. cit., p. 135.
[24] See *The Study of the American School Superintendency 2000: A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium* (Glass, T., L. Bjork and C. Brunner, Eds.). Additional context is provided in Glass, T. 2001. "Superintendents Leaders Look at the Superintendency, School Boards, and Reform." ECS Issue Paper, July 2001, Education Commission of the States. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED468335.pdf. Both cited in Alsbury, T., Op. cit., p. 135.

for mitigating conflict often lies with superintendents. Superintendents, then, should be aware of the five different types of conflict that can arise:[25]

- Philosophical (value differences);

- Resource-based (competition for scarce resources);

- Interpersonal (e.g., personality clashes);

- Territorial (power and jurisdictional disputes); and

- Perceptual (e.g., assumptions not validated).

When conflict does arise, superintendents must identify which of the above factors are at play and adapt their strategy accordingly. This approach allows school executives to use conflict to their advantage. For example, arguments over funding distribution between two departments could be used to prompt useful, thorough conversations about a district's curriculum more broadly.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR FORMAL EVALUATIONS

Research presents a general consensus that well-executed, apolitical evaluations of superintendents are integral to an overall strategy for collaborative board and superintendent relations. First and foremost, Kowalski notes that districts should take care to conduct formal evaluations on an annual or semi-annual basis. A national study of school districts conducted in 2000 found that 20 percent of superintendents were never evaluated formally.[26] Furthermore, historically, leadership evaluation models have been "defined by overly subjective and vague judgments, little feedback or guidance on performance, and few analytics or relevant metrics to define strengths and weaknesses," issues that have left superintendents and school boards alike unsatisfied with the process.[27]

*Successful superintendent evaluations are the result of rigorous planning on the part of the board.*

While most school boards understand the importance of superintendent evaluations, confusion still reigns regarding effective processes for conducting evaluations. Sandy Gundlach, of the Minnesota School Board Association, recently identified best practices for conducting superintendent assessments. Ultimately, Gundlach argues that successful superintendent evaluations are the result of rigorous planning on the part of the board. That is, effective school boards recognize the formal evaluation as an opportunity to affect change in a superintendent's

---

[25] Kowalski, T. J., Op. cit., p. 159.

[26] Glass, et al., 2000 (op. cit.). Cited in Kowalski, T. J., Op. cit., p. 159.

[27] DiPaola, M.F. "Revisiting Superintendent Evaluation." *School Administrator*, June 2007. Cited in "Effective Superintendents: ECRA Literature Review." 2010. ECRA Group. http://resources.aasa.org/ConferenceDaily/handouts2011/3000-1.pdf

future performance. Utilizing it as such requires a thorough review of district priorities and past performance. Gundlach outlines three measures school boards should take before conducting an evaluation:[28]

- Gather and review relevant documents and identify emerging issues and any areas of concern that need special attention.

- Hold a meeting for the purpose of developing the evaluation process and procedures.

- Agree on the evaluation method, instrument, criteria, and timeline to be used.

In addition to thorough planning, Gundlach urges districts to limit discussion to a superintendent's performance related to a few, specific, predetermined goals. Because school board members often have limited knowledge of the specifics of a superintendent's job, this tactic keeps discussion targeted and digestible for all those involved. By evaluating the superintendent against a few specific goals, the board also sets the tone for future expectations and better communicates their overall priorities to the superintendent.[29]

During the evaluation itself, school boards should assess the superintendent's performance on selected goals using the following framework: "What progress has been made and what evidence exists to validate that progress?"[30] Superintendents can facilitate this process by ensuring that the written report they submit prior to evaluation is as thorough as possible. Finally, Gundlach encourages school boards to allow superintendents ample opportunity to evaluate their own progress, ask questions, and discuss plans for future growth.[31]

While each district is unique, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has established a model timeline for assessments. Figure 1.3 on the following page outlines this cycle.[32]

---

[28] Gundlach, S., "Developing a Fair and Effective Superintendent Evaluation," Minnesota School Boards Association, MSBA Journal, 2008. pp. 18-20.
   http://www.mnmsba.org/Public/MSBA_Docs/DevelSuptEval.pdf?CFID=4500607&CFTOKEN=88138630
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] "Implementation Guide for Superintendent Evaluation," Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, January, 2012. pp. 6 – 7. http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/model/PartVI.pdf

**Figure 1.3: Massachusetts DESE Annual Five-Step Cycle for Superintendent Evaluations**
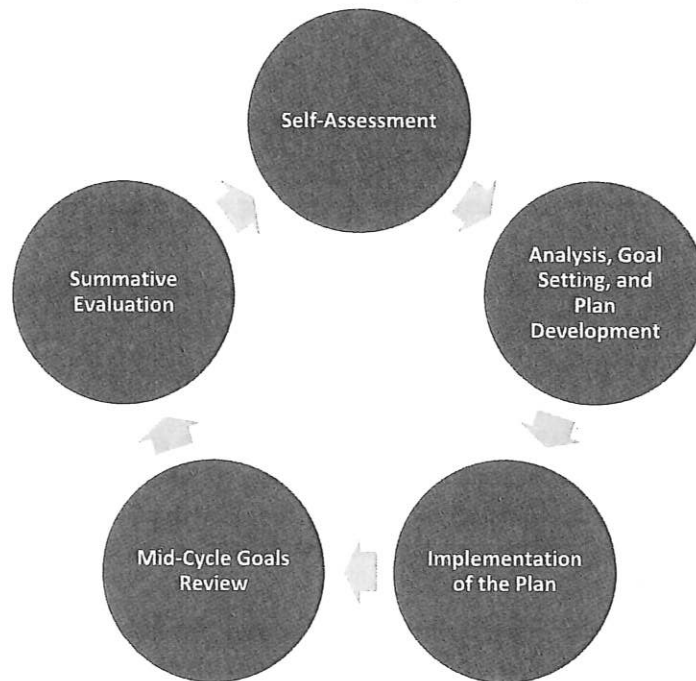


Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education[33]

A description of the general best practices associated with each step follows:

- **Cycle Step 1 - Superintendent's Self-Assessment:** During this phase, the superintendent compares his or her own performance to a predetermined rubric, looking at student learning data and past progress toward district goals. The superintendent then sets goals for his or her own future performance.

- **Cycle Step 2 - Analysis, Goal Setting, and Plan Development:** In this phase, the superintendent works closely with the school committee to develop the superintendent's annual plan, which is later used to assess his/her performance.

- **Cycle Step 3 - Superintendent Plan Implementation and Collection of Evidence:** Here, the superintendent implements the goals laid out in the annual plan, and committee members track progress on these goals periodically.

- **Cycle Step 4 - Mid-Cycle Goals Review:** This phase of the cycle allows the superintendent to receive constructive feedback on his/her current progress and to make adjustments to goals as deemed necessary.

- **Cycle Step 5 - End-of-Cycle and Summative Evaluation Reports:** The final performance review entails a thorough evaluation of the superintendent's progress toward each goal previously laid out.[34]

---

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

## MODEL COMMUNICATION POLICIES

Given the prevalent theme of communication within the literature and its importance to promote smooth board/superintendent relations, one practice that has emerged is for districts to embed communication guidelines within their overall policy. The following pages examine practices at two exemplar districts, Aldine Independent School District and Seattle Public Schools, which show how policy can promote better communication among superintendents and school boards.

### ALDINE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Recipient of the 2009 Broad Prize for Urban Education, Aldine Independent School District attributes part of its success as a district to strong communication practices between its school board and superintendent.[35] This constructive dynamic has become institutionalized, in part, through the adoption of clear communication policies laid out in the district's "Board Procedure Manual." This comprehensive set of guidelines includes mandates that clearly communicate how the board and superintendent should interact, with specific details such as the recommended frequency of contact and how the board should request information from the superintendent. The published guidelines related specifically to board/superintendent relationships are presented and briefly summarized in the following five general subcategories:[36]

- **Communicating with team members before board meetings:** When asked by the board, superintendents are required to submit information packets detailing progress on board goals, answers to board questions, administrative updates, etc.

- **Requesting information not related to agenda items:** Board members are permitted to request additional information directly from the superintendent; however, if this information is not readily available, superintendents should be granted additional time to draft a report.

- **Attending school events and visiting schools:** Board members are encouraged to attend as many school events as their time permits.

- **Responding to community or employee complaints:** The board must inform the superintendent of all complaints from staff and the community; however, it must not direct the superintendent to take specific action. The superintendent must notify the board upon the resolution of such complaints.

- **Communication with the community:** Any non-anonymous letters addressed to the board must be forwarded to the board president or superintendent for inclusion in the board information packet.

---

[35] "Aldine Independent School District," The Broad Prize for Urban Education, 2009. http://www.broadprize.org/asset/1334-tbp2009factsheetaldine.pdf

[36] "Aldine Independent School District Board Procedure Manual," Aldine Independent School District. pp. 13-17. http://www.broadprize.org/asset/1357-aldine%20board%20procedure%20man.pdf

### SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) also takes a policy-based approach toward encouraging a strong relationship between its board and superintendent. In addition to clarifying the unique roles of these two parties within its policy handbook, SPS also lists several tenets specifically related to communication:[37]

- The board and its members shall not issue directives to staff except through the superintendent or the superintendent's designated representative(s).

- Individual board members shall not request from the superintendent or staff the preparation of a report or compilation of materials not readily available and involving significant staff time unless the majority of a committee or the board [...] approved the preparation of the report [...]

- Members of the board shall refer all personal appeals, applications, complaints, and other communications concerning the administration of the school district to the superintendent or his or her designated representative(s) for investigation and report to the board member.

- Communications between the board and the superintendent will be governed by the following practices: exercise honesty in all written and interpersonal interaction; demonstrate respect for the opinions and comments of each other; maintain focus on common goals.

---

[37] Verbatim from "Board-Superintendent Relationship," Seattle Public Schools, June 1, 2011.
http://www.seattleschools.org/modules/groups/homepagefiles/cms/1583136/File/Policies/Board/series1000/16 20.pdf

# SECTION II: EFFECTIVE BOARD GOVERNANCE

While the preceding section focused on building effective relationships between superintendents and school boards, this section addresses the literature and best practices related to effective board governance more broadly. Specifically, this section highlights strategies for engaging community members, best practices for urban districts, and techniques for navigating board politics.

## BOARD GOVERNANCE AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Communities often view the function of their school boards as completely removed from impacts on student achievement. In fact, many solely expect their board members to fulfill the duties associated with traditional board roles, such as "setting budgets, establishing school boundaries, and setting school policy."[38] Some community members even perceive school boards as "amorphous blobs" that suck up resources and constitute unnecessary overhead costs.[39] However, across the available research on school board governance, an overall theme emerges: a school board's actions and level of success in governing the district impact student achievement.

A publication of the Iowa Association of School Boards, "The Lighthouse Inquiry," represents one of the first and most extensive attempts to measure this correlation.[40] The study finds that school boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than school boards in low-achieving districts.[41] Similarly, a meta-analysis of 27 studies on school board governance finds a statistically significant correlation between five specific district governance practices and higher student achievement (positive correlation of .24).[42] Finally, the Education Writers Association finds clear differences between "functional" and "dysfunctional" school boards as they relate to student achievement. Thus, all three of these comprehensive studies illustrate a relationship between board governance and student achievement, and they identify many of the same behaviors and characteristics of successful school boards. The following strategies represent an overview of the best practices for school boards in affecting student learning, as determined by the three studies outlined above:

---

[38] Thompson, R., "School Board Presidents and Superintendents' Use of Transformational Leadership to Improve Student Outcomes," *National Forum of Education Administration and Supervision Journal*, Volume 30, Number 4, 2013.
http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Thompson,%20Ray%20School%20Board%20P residents%20NFEASJ%20V30%20N4%202013.pdf

[39] Waters, J. T. and Marzano R., "School District Leadership that Works," Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, September, 2006. p. 11.
https://www.cosa.k12.or.us/downloads/profdev/SuperintendentLeadership.pdf

[40] "The Lighthouse Inquiry," Iowa Association of School Boards, October 2000. http://www.ia-sb.org/assets/FADFDF72-BE9D-48D7-8CF9-19B823F0CDA1.pdf

[41] Ibid., p. 6.

[42] Waters, J. T. and Marzano R., Op. cit., pp. 3-4.

- Districts with higher levels of student achievement show clear alignment of board, district, and school efforts in support of non-negotiable goals.[43]

- While school boards at low-achieving districts often view students as limited by external factors, those at high-achieving districts perceive social and economic conditions as "challenges in the quest to help students succeed."[44]

- Board members in high-achieving districts are highly aware and informed of school improvement initiatives, while low-achieving district board members can rarely articulate the specifics of these projects/goals.[45]

- In districts with high-achieving boards, staff members are consistently able to identify building-specific practices that are aligned with overall board-stated goals; low-achieving districts lack this alignment.[46]

- "Functional" school boards have put processes in place for orienting new board members in order to reduce the negative effects of turnover. In addition, these districts seek out continuous training opportunities for school board members.[47]

- "Functional" school boards keep regulations to a minimum.[48]

- "Functional" school boards communicate as one body and interact with media in an "ethical manner."[49]

## BUILDING POSITIVE COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Research on effective board governance consistently points out that high-achieving school districts almost always show strong ties between the community and board members. More than simply a courtesy carried out by board members, the maintenance of this relationship can ultimately determine a school district's results. In fact, the Center for Public Education lists strong "collaborative relationships with staff and the community" as one of its "eight characteristics for effective school boards."[50] A report by the Center for Public Education elaborates on this priority, stating that these relations involve informing and engaging external stakeholders in the establishment and attainment of district goals.[51] David Else, of the University of Northern Iowa, underscores and adds to this argument, laying out specific best practices related to community relations:[52]

---

[43] Waters, J. T. and Marzano R., Op. cit., p. 4.
[44] "The Lighthouse Inquiry," Op. cit., p. 6.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] "Effective Superintendents, Effective Boards: Finding the Right Fit," Op. cit., p. 7.
   http://www.ewa.org/docs/leadership.pdf
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] "Eight characteristics of effective school boards: At a glance," Center for Public Education, January 28, 2011.
   http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards#sthash.rWR4vLtL.dpuf
[51] Ibid.
[52] Verbatim from Else, D., "Strengthening Board of Education / Superintendent Relationships in America's Schools," University of Northern Iowa Institute for Educational Research, 1993.
   http://www.uni.edu/coe/iel/monographs/bs.html

- Protect board/superintendent credibility by communicating only truthful, substantial messages to the public.

- Ensure that messages are consistently communicated to all internal and external publics over time by the original source.

- Recognize the unique role and influence all staff members and students have on reaching external publics.

- Develop links that are comprehensive, addressing the diverse educational needs of all members of the community.

- Reach out to provide meaningful involvement for all segments of the community.

- Understand the important role mass communication plays in our society and develop means for working with it.

- Develop direct dialogue with boards of other entities.

## SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE IN URBAN DISTRICTS

Much of the research on school board governance specific to urban districts echoes the broader findings on effective board practices in general. However, Don McAdams finds that urban districts must remain particularly focused on a few specific strategies when attempting to increase student achievement.[53] He repeatedly points out that the strong reform needed in urban districts requires the support of community members.[54] He notes that boards and superintendents will experience debilitating pushback and feet-dragging from the public they serve if reforms are created and implemented without community consent, involvement, and support. This type of support can be garnered through grassroots-style campaigning, in which community leaders are first convinced to embrace a board's core beliefs and theory of action. This system makes use of the clout that other community members hold in a district, allowing these individuals to carry out the often difficult legwork of convincing district residents to support a new initiative.[55]

> *Urban district superintendents and boards will experience debilitating pushback and feet-dragging from the public they serve if reforms are created and implemented without community consent, involvement, and support.*

McAdams also notes that the sweeping nature of urban district reform requires timelines that often outlast the terms served on school boards. Thus, urban district reform involves the work of gradually evolving teams. Failing to recognize this issue can undermine a board's goals for academic achievement, according to a separate report on school board turnover by Thomas Alsbury. He finds a statistically significant negative correlation between

---

[53] McAdams, D., "What School Boards Can Do: Reform Governance for Urban Schools," Teachers College Press, January 1, 2006. Retrieved from GoogleBooks.
[54] Ibid., pp. 19-20.
[55] Ibid.

school board turnover and student test scores.[56] To avoid this issue, McAdams urges urban districts to implement systems for managing succession to uphold reform initiatives. He states, "Broad public understanding and support of the board's theory of action enables succession planning to become effective succession management." Under this system, strong community support of an initiative ensures that only board members who support such reform will be elected, guaranteeing the longevity of a strategy.[57]

A separate report on urban district governance supports McAdams' claims and adds an additional strategy to the policy toolkit. It finds that urban districts can better implement reform policies when utilizing a 'triage' approach. That is, successful urban school boards target resources at the most underperforming schools within their districts, rather than equally distributing reform resources to all schools. Similarly, the report finds that reform is consistently more effective at the elementary school level than at high schools, and encourages school boards to fund strategies accordingly.[58]

## NAVIGATING POLITICS

As elected officials, school board members inevitably face political hurdles when attempting to improve district performance. Special interest group activism, ideological divides in the community, and the public's general loss of confidence in a district's educational leaders can place school board members in political, reform-inhibiting binds.[59] Cassel finds that school board members often ignore potentially effective recommendations from their superintendents, opting for safer, more centrist policy options.[60] One proposed solution to this gridlock involves board members engaging in "closed-door, one-on-one negotiations." These sessions allow a board to resolve conflicts in order to present a more unified, politically-favorable appearance to the public. [61] McAdams underscores this recommendation, stressing that board meetings offer an opportunity to gain political favor among the public. He urges boards to appear as organized, diplomatic, and well-informed as possible in order to secure support for reform.[62]

---

[56] Alsbury, T., "School Board Member and Superintendent Turnover and the Influence on Student Achievement: An Application of the Dissatisfaction Theory," April 18, 2008.
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15700760701748428#.UoInJsSsim5

[57] McAdams, D., Op. Cit., pp. 20-21

[58] "Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement," MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools, September, 2002. p. xviii.
http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/foundations_for_success_fr.pdf

[59] Alsbury, T., Op. cit., p. 126.

[60] See Cassel, R.N. 1999. The American Academy of School Psychology Offers Promise for School Problems and a Nation at Risk. *Education*, 119(4), pp. 584-587. Cited in Alsbury, T., Op. cit.

[61] Alsbury, T., Op. cit., p. 135.

[62] McAdams, D., Op. Cit., pp. 84 – 88.

## POLICY GOVERNANCE

Education leader John Carver proposes a specific model for effective board governance, dubbed "policy governance" (also commonly referred to simply as the Carver Model), which has been widely adopted by school boards across the country.[63] According to Carver, policy governance involves a board exercising power as a group rather than a collection of individual members. It also involves a strong focus on reaching board-stated goals, measuring achievement in terms of ends rather than means, and governing by explicitly laying out "unacceptable" and "acceptable" practices within the district (i.e., clear policies).

In addition, policy governance requires boards to solely focus on long-range planning and to grant their superintendents authority to decide on all other issues. The bulk of board meeting time is spent planning future policy, rather than reviewing past performance.[64] Ultimately, this approach to board governance reaffirms many of the best practices outlined in the broader literature on the topic. Carver identifies several key areas of divergence of the Policy Governance model from other types of governance structures; comparisons along various dimensions, as outlined by Partners in Policy Governance (a consulting firm specializing in Policy Governance implementation), are shown in Figure 2.1, below.

**Figure 2.1: Comparison of Policy Governance and Alternate Governance Structures**

| FUNCTIONS | TRADITIONAL NONPROFIT | POLICY GOVERNANCE | EXECUTIVE-CENTERED | WORKING BOARD | CORPORATE | COLLECTIVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Board Functions** (development, recruitment, structure, etc.) | Board driven, executive driven | Board | Executive | Board | Either | Shared |
| **Board Process** (how the board does its work) | Board | Board | Executive | Board | Either | Shared |
| **Managing the Business** | Board delegates to executive, but stays involved in operating detail | Executive | Executive | Board directly involved | Executive with close board oversight | Primarily executive, but board may help |
| **Doing the work** | Staff | Staff | Staff | Board | Staff | Staff/Board |
| **Setting Direction** | Board sets direction with executive guidance; board or committee often creates the plan | Board defines expected results; executive develops the plan within limits set by the board | Executive | Board defines big picture and operational detail | Board with executive leadership | Board with executive direction |

---

[63] A succinct overview of the model and example implementers is provided by Partners in Policy Governance, a consulting firm specializing in the implementation of the model. See: "Policy Governance." Partners in Policy Governance. http://www.policygovernanceconsulting.com/the-carver-policy-governance-model/resources/articles-and-tools/38-policy-governance-in-a-nutshell-by-john-carve. Carver maintains his own authoritative website detailing the model, based on his foundational works, at http://www.carvergovernance.com/model.htm.

[64] Ibid.

| Functions | Traditional Nonprofit | Policy Governance | Executive-Centered | Working Board | Corporate | Collective |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Representing Membership | Board | Board | Board | Board | Focus on outcomes and performance (ROI), not representation | Board |
| Executive/Board Relationship | Executive subordinate to board, relationship not explicitly addressed | Explicit division, interactions clearly defined, executive subordinate to board, board sets parameters | Board de facto subordinate to executive, as they control process and direction | Executive subordinate to board, relationship not explicitly addressed, much cross-over | Executive sits on board, plays leadership role, roles not explicitly addressed and sometimes crossover, but rarely does the board become involved in operations | Partnership, executive *pilots* the board, relationship not explicitly addressed |
| Committees | Do much of work and oversight, report to board, extensive committee structure supported by staff, board receives reports | Relatively few, task forces okay, only do work related to the board, operational committees report to the CEO/ED | - | Committees support work of operations, board member workload heavier | Often task forces on strategic issues, some committees | - |
| Board Role | Direction, oversight of operations, fundraising | Primary role to establish policies on ends, executive limits, board/executive relationship, board process | Final decision-maker on issues brought forth by executive | All issues, strategic and operational | Strategic issues, major operational issues | Final decisions on matters, monitors operations |
| Executive Role | Guidance to the board, management of the business | Responsible to the board, not for it; operational issues, strategic and tactical decisions | Fundamental role guide and manage the board | If exist, implement board decisions | Leads direction and operations | Guides the board, manages operations |
| Fiduciary Responsibility | Board, but control is delegated to the executive | Board | Board, but executive has control of mechanisms | Board | Board, but executive has control of mechanisms | Board, but executive has control of mechanisms |

| FUNCTIONS | TRADITIONAL NONPROFIT | POLICY GOVERNANCE | EXECUTIVE-CENTERED | WORKING BOARD | CORPORATE | COLLECTIVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Financial Decisions** | Treasurer and Finance Committee see procedures and oversee; full board reviews full financials | CEO/ED has full decision-making power within the limits set by the board | CEO/ED makes decisions, may or may not require board approval of budget | Board is largely in control of all financial decisions | CEO/ED led, board approval of major decisions | Board and staff work on financial matters as a team |
| **Human Resources** | Board sets personnel policy, ED/CEO reports to chair, communication between chair and CEO | ED reports to full board only, all staff report to CEO/ED, personnel policy is operating policy and is set by CEO/ED | ED/CEO controls and sets policy | Board is personnel, sets policy, CEO reports to chair or full board and may be on the board | CEO controls HR, reports to board but also often is chair | HR decisions are made as a team, reporting lines are obscure |
| **Monitoring for Accountability** | Committee oversight | Executive limitations, aggressive executive evaluation | Executive brings information forward to the board | Board, if at all | Executive brings information forward to the board | Executive brings information forward; board inquiries into areas of concern |
| **Resource Securing** | Board | CEO/ED (Board optional) | Either | Board | Executive | Shared |
| **Decision-Making Power** | Board with executive input | Clear division of authority between board and executive, each free in their own areas (but can choose to seek input from each other) | Board has final say but agenda and preferences are driven by executive | Board, often uses grassroots or collective method of problem-solving | Board has final say but agenda and preferences are often driven by executive | Shared |

Source: Partners in Policy Governance[65]

---

[65] Reproduced from Partners in Policy Governance (Ibid.). Original figure cites Brown, W.A. 2000. *Understanding Organizational Configuration and Models of Board Governance in Nonprofit Organizations*; Fletcher, K. "Four Books on Nonprofit Boards and Governance." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Summer 1999; and George, L. "Board Models Comparison Chart." In *Board Basics Manual*, United Way of Canada.

# PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

Hanover Research is committed to providing a work product that meets or exceeds partner expectations. In keeping with that goal, we would like to hear your opinions regarding our reports. Feedback is critically important and serves as the strongest mechanism by which we tailor our research to your organization. When you have had a chance to evaluate this report, please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire.

http://www.hanoverresearch.com/evaluation/index.php

# CAVEAT

The publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this brief. The publisher and authors make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this brief and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. There are no warranties which extend beyond the descriptions contained in this paragraph. No warranty may be created or extended by representatives of Hanover Research or its marketing materials. The accuracy and completeness of the information provided herein and the opinions stated herein are not guaranteed or warranted to produce any particular results, and the advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every partner. Neither the publisher nor the authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Moreover, Hanover Research is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. Partners requiring such services are advised to consult an appropriate professional.

HANOVER
R E S E A R C H

1750 H Street NW, 2nd Floor
Washington, DC 20006

P 202.756.2971  F 866.808.6585
www.hanoverresearch.com

Township of Union
Public Schools

# Township of Union School District's Journey to Excellence

# Strategic Plan 2022-2025

## Year 1- 2022-2023

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 1- Learning Growth: the district will foster learning experiences that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging. | G1.A1 (curriculum): curricula will be updated (math, English language arts, social studies, world language, and computer science) using the Connected Action Roadmap process and will include common assessments across grade-levels and departments at the middle and high schools. | G1.C1 (curriculum): G. Perez | G1.B1 (curriculum): operating budget for curriculum revision |
| | G1.A2 (assessment): common assessments will be created for the subjects being updated (math, English language arts, social studies, world language, and computer science). | G1.C2 (assessment): G. Perez | G1.B2 (assessment): operating budget for curriculum revision |
| | G1.A3 (instruction): professional development experiences will emphasize strategies that focus on constructivist teaching strategies, project-based learning, and the differentiation of instruction. | G1.C3 (instruction): G. Perez | G1.B3 (instruction): Title IIA |
| | G1.A4 (evaluation): The evaluation schedule will have vice principals and principals assuming greater responsibility. | G1.C4 (evaluation): G. Benaquista | G1.B4 (evaluation): none |
| | G1.A4.2 (evaluation): the District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC) will be re- | | |

established and meet at least three times to discuss the effectiveness of current evaluation instruments and the process of providing staff, faculty, and leaders feedback about practice.

G1.A4.3 (evaluation): evaluation norming exercises will be conducted for the leadership team in order to standardize performance expectations.

G1.A5 (high school academies): a team of high school teachers, counselors, and leaders will conduct site visits to New Jersey high schools, including Red Bank Regional High school, to learn about specialized academies.

G1.A5.2 (high school academies): data will be collected via surveys and focus groups and Union High School Specialized Academies will be identified for initial implementation in 2023-2024.

G1.A6 (high school field experiences): a handbook will be created for students that describes current mentorship and internship programs. A 2023-2024 handbook will be created to include expanded field experience opportunities.

G1.C5 (high school academies): S. Taylor

G1.C6 (high school field experiences): TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs

G1.B5 (high school academies): operating budget for substitute teachers

G1.B6 (high school field experiences): none

G1.A7 (middle and high school schedules): schedules for the middle and high schools will be evaluated for learning effectiveness and block schedules to maximize instructional time will be considered for 2023-2024 schedules.

G1.C7 (middle and high school schedules): G. Benaquista

G1.B7 (middle and high school schedules): none

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 2- Community Partnerships: the district will create and sustain a town wide conglomerate purposed to enhance opportunities for students to grow that encompasses all of the various community entities. | G2.A1: create stipend position to coordinate community-district partnerships titled Community Partnership Coordinator that leads to additional learning opportunities outside the district.<br><br>G2.A1.2: coordinator will meet with government officials and local businesses to plan expanded partnerships with the school district.<br><br>G2.A1.3: coordinator will develop handbook that lists existing community partnerships. | G2.C1: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G2.B1: operating budget for employee salaries |

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 3- Equity: the district will ensure equitable access and inclusion to all domains of its operation and programs to support the social, emotional, and academic growth for all students no matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, learning style, disability, sexual orientation or sexual identity. | G3.A1: hire Dean of Restorative Practices. | G3.C1: high school principal | G3.B1: operating budget for employee salaries |
| | G3.A1.2: dean will coordinate professional development and develop a systemic restorative practices implementation plan. | | |
| | G3.A1.3: dean will identify student and adult leaders in Grades 9-12 to serve as restorative practice leaders and prepare to turnkey their new knowledge and skills with peers and colleagues. | | |
| | G3.A1.4: dean will coordinate professional development for Grades 9-12 student and adult leaders. | | |
| | G3.A2: all faculty will participate in professional development experiences that foster cultural responsiveness including exercises that help recognize implicit bias and microaggression. | G3.C2: G. Perez | G3.B2: Title IIA |
| | G3.A3: the district will contract the services of a professional who can conduct an "equity audit" of the district's programs, including those that relate to academic support and district operations. | G3.C3: G. Perez | G3.B3: Title I |
| | G3.A4: the district will employ a consultant to assist with efforts to expand the faculty and leadership | G3.C4: G. Benaquista | G3.B4: operating budget for services |

pool of minority candidates and implement suggested actions.

G3.A5: entry protocols for the district's gifted and talented programs will be reviewed and considered for revision in 2023-2024.

G3.C4: G. Perez

G3.B4: none

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 4- The Whole Child: the district will create and implement programs (academic, career, technical, and social) that support the holistic development of all students. | G4.A1: Grades K-5 faculty and leadership will examine social-emotional learning strategies that can be implemented on a regular basis in classrooms. Such strategies to examine include-Responsive Classroom (https://www.responsiveclassroom.org) and Second Step (https://www.secondstep.org/what-is-second-step) | G4.C1: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G4.B1: Title IIA |
| | G4.A2: professional development experiences will emphasize strategies that foster social-emotional well-being. | G4.C2: G. Perez and S. Taylor | G4.B2: Title IIA |
| | G4.A3: a plan for a K-12 interscholastic mentoring program will be developed for 2023-2024 implementation. | G4.C3: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G4.B3: none |
| | G4.A4: parents and guardians will participate in programs designed by the district intended to prepare students for transitions to schools. | G4.C4: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G4.C4: none |
| | G4.A5: "Freshman Seminar" will be created for all incoming high school students. | G4.C5: high school principal | G4.C5: operating budget for curriculum revision |

## Year 2- 2023-2024

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 1- Learning Growth: the district will foster learning experiences that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging. | G1.A1 (curriculum): curricula will be updated (TBD) using the Connected Action Roadmap process and will include common assessments across grade-levels and departments at the middle and high schools. | G1.C1 (curriculum): G. Perez | G1.B1 (curriculum): operating budget for curriculum revision |
| | G1.A2 (assessment) common assessments will be created for the subjects being updated (TBD).<br><br>G1.A2.2 (assessment): standards-based grading practice will be researched by a team of stakeholders for implementation consideration in 2024-2025. | G1.C2 (assessment): G. Perez | G1.B2 (assessment): operating budget for curriculum revision |
| | G1.A3 (instruction): professional development experiences will continue to emphasize strategies that focus on constructivist teaching strategies, project-based learning, and the differentiation of instruction. | G1.C3 (instruction): G. Perez | G1.B3 (instruction): Title IIA |
| | G1.A4 (evaluation): the District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC) will continue to meet at least three times to discuss the effectiveness of current evaluation instruments and the process of providing staff, faculty, and | G1.C4 (evaluation): G. Benaquista | G1.B4 (evaluation): none |

leaders feedback about practice.

G1.A4.2 (evaluation): evaluation norming exercises will continue to be conducted for the leadership team in order to standardize performance expectations.

G1.A5 (high school academies): Union High School Specialized Academies will be initially implemented.

G1.A5.2 (high school academies): data will be collected via surveys and focus groups to determine expansion of the Union High School Specialized Academies.

G1.A6 (high school field experiences): a coordinator for field experiences will be hired for a stipend-supported position whose responsibility will be to expand offerings.

G1.A7 (middle and high school schedules): schedules for the middle and high schools will be implemented in block schedule format, pending the outcome of the 2022-2023 evaluation.

G1.A8 (homework): the district's homework policy will be evaluated by a group of stakeholders and consideration for revision will be

G1.C5 (high school academies): S. Taylor

G1.C6 (high school field experiences): TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs

G1.C7 (middle and high school schedules): G. Benaquista

G1.C8 (homework): G. Perez

G1.B5 (high school academies): operating budget for curriculum revision

G1.B6 (high school field experiences): operating budget for employee salaries

G1.B7 (middle and high school schedules): none

G1.B8 (homework): none

given for 2024-2025.

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 2- Community Partnerships: the district will create and sustain a town wide conglomerate purposed to enhance opportunities for students to grow that encompasses all of the various community entities. | G2.A1: coordinator will continue to meet with government officials and local businesses to plan expanded partnerships with the school district. | G2.C1: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G2.B1: none |
| | G2.A2: coordinator will expand handbook that lists existing community partnerships. | G2.C2: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G2.B2: none |
| | G2.A3: coordinator will associate community partnerships with Union High School Academies according to career focus. | G2.C3: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G2.B3: none |

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 3- Equity: the district will ensure equitable access and inclusion to all domains of its operation and programs to support the social, emotional, and academic growth for all students no matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, learning style, disability, sexual orientation, or sexual identity. | G3.A1: dean will continue to coordinate professional development and develop a systemic restorative practices implementation plan. | G3.C1: high school principal | G3.B1: none |
| | G3.A1.2: dean will coordinate implementation of daily or semi-daily community-building activities led by student leaders. | | |
| | G3.A1.3: dean will continue to coordinate professional development for Grades 9-12 student and adult leaders. | | |
| | G3.A1.4: dean will recruit and train next year's student leaders. | | |
| | G3.A1.5: dean will coordinate implementation of restorative circles for students suspended from school. | | |
| | G3.A2: all faculty will continue to participate in professional development experiences that foster cultural responsiveness including exercises that help recognize implicit bias and microaggression. | G3.C2: G. Perez | G3.B2: Title IIA |
| | G3.A3: the district will implement changes based on the results of the 2023-2024 "equity audit." | G3.C3: G. Perez | G3.B3: Title I |

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 4- The Whole Child: the district will create and implement programs (academic, career, technical, and social) that support the holistic development of all students. | G4.A1: Grades K-5 faculty and leadership will continue to examine social-emotional learning strategies that can be implemented on a regular basis in classrooms and one of two strategies (Responsive Classroom or Second Step) will begin the first phase of implementation in elementary schools. | G4.C1: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G4.B1: Title IIA |
| | G4.A2: professional development experiences will continue to emphasize strategies that foster social-emotional well-being. | G4.C2: G. Perez and S. Taylor | G4.B2: Title IIA |
| | G4.A3: a K-12 interscholastic mentoring program will be implemented based on planning conducted in 2022-2023. | G4.C3: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G4.B3: none |
| | G4.A4: parents and guardians will continue to participate in programs designed by the district intended to prepare students for transitions to schools. | G4.C4: supervisor of counseling | G4.C4: none |
| | G4.A5: "Freshman Seminar" will be implemented for all incoming high school students based on planning conducted in 2022-2023. | G4.C5: high school principal | G4.B5: operating budget for curriculum revision |

# Year 3- 2024-2025

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 1- Learning Growth: the district will foster learning experiences that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging. | G1.A1 (curriculum): curricula will be updated (TBD) using the Connected Action Roadmap process and will include common assessments across grade-levels and departments at the middle and high schools. | G1.C1 (curriculum): G. Perez | G1.B1 (curriculum): operating budget for curriculum revision |
| | G1.A2 (assessment) common assessments will be created for the subjects being updated (TBD). | G1.C2 (assessment): G. Perez | G1.B2 (assessment): operating budget for curriculum revision |
| | G1.A2.2 (assessment): standards-based grading will be implemented, pending outcome of research conducted in 2023-2024. | | |
| | G1.A3 (instruction): professional development experiences will continue to emphasize strategies that focus on constructivist teaching strategies, project-based learning, and the differentiation of instruction. | G1.C3 (instructions): G. Perez | G1.B3 (instruction): Title IIA |
| | G1.A4 (evaluation): the District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC) will continue to meet at least three times to discuss the effectiveness of current evaluation instruments and the process of providing staff, faculty, and leaders feedback about practice. | G1.C4 (evaluation): G. Benaquista | G1.B4 (evaluation): none |

G1.A4.2 (evaluation): evaluation norming exercises will continue to be conducted for the leadership team in order to standardize performance expectations.

G1.A5 (high school academies): Union High School Specialized Academies will be expanded.

G1.A5.2 (high school academies): data will be collected via surveys and focus groups to determine continued expansion of the Union High School Specialized Academies.

G1.A6 (high school field experiences): the coordinator for field experiences will expand program offerings.

G1.A7 (homework): the updated version of the district's homework policy and protocols will be implemented pending 2023-2024 review.

G1.C5 (high school academies): S. Taylor

G1.C6 (high school field experiences): TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs

G1.C7 (homework): G. Perez

G1.AB (high school academies): operating budget for curriculum revision; operating budget for capital projects

G1.B6 (high school field experiences): operating budget for employee salaries

G1.B7 (middle and high school schedules): none

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 2- Community Partnerships: the district will create and sustain a town wide conglomerate purposed to enhance opportunities for students to grow that encompasses all of the various community entities. | G2.A1: coordinator will continue to meet with government officials and local businesses to plan expanded partnerships with the school district. | G2.C1: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G2.B1: none |
| | G2.A2: coordinator will continue to expand handbook that lists existing community partnerships. | G2.C2: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G2.B2: none |
| | G2.A3: coordinator will continue to associate community partnerships with Union High School Academies according to career focus. | G2.C3: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G2.B3: none |

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 3- Equity: The district will ensure equitable access and inclusion to all domains of its operation and programs to support the social, emotional, and academic growth for all students no matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, learning style, disability, sexual orientation or sexual identity. | G3.A1: dean will continue to coordinate professional development and develop a systemic restorative practices implementation plan. | G3.C1: high school principal | G3.B1: none |
| | G3.A1.2: dean will continue to coordinate implementation of daily or semi-daily community-building activities led by student leaders. | | |
| | G3.A1.3: dean will continue to coordinate professional development for Grades 9-12 student and adult leaders. | | |
| | G3.A1.4: dean will continue to recruit and train next year's student leaders. | | |
| | G3.A1.5: dean will continue to coordinate implementation of restorative circles for students suspended from school. | | |
| | G3.A2: all faculty will continue to participate in professional development experiences that foster cultural responsiveness including exercises that help recognize implicit bias and microaggression. | G3.C2: G. Perez | G3.B2: Title IIA |

| Goal | Action Steps | Action Coordinator | Impact on Budget |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 4- The Whole Child: the district will create and implement programs (academic, career, technical, and social) that support the holistic development of all students. | G4.A1: professional development will continue to be conducted for all Grades K-5 faculty and leadership related to chosen social-emotional learning strategy that will be implemented on a regular basis in elementary classrooms. | G4.C1: TBD director of instruction and grant funded programs | G4.B1: Title IIA |
| | G4.A2: professional development experiences will continue to emphasize strategies that foster social-emotional well-being. | G4.C2 (social-emotional well-being): G. Perez and S. Taylor | G4.B2: Title IIA |
| | G4.A3: the revised K-8 counseling curriculum that includes exposure to post-secondary opportunities, including college and university and vocational-technical experiences will be implemented. | G4.C3: supervisor of counseling | G4.B3: none |
| | G4.A4: parents and guardians will continue to participate in programs designed by the district intended to prepare students for transitions to schools. | G4.C4: supervisor of counseling | G4.B4: none |

# Top 10 Tips for Effective Strategic Planning

Effective Strategic Planning Can Lead to Transformational Change

With the demands and complexities of public school systems in the 21st century, it is hard to imagine how school districts can continue raising the bar without effective and comprehensive strategic planning.

As I talk with people about strategic planning, I typically see people fall into one of two camps. Those who love it and those who hate it. Those that hate it usually do as a result of a bad experience. I can't say that I blame them. We have all either experienced or heard stories where a lot of time, effort, and money was put into developing a strategic plan only to find it sit on a shelf. We call those S.P.O.T.S. (Strategic Plans on the Shelf).

Stakeholders were not included in the process, it was not effectively communicated, it was not embraced, nobody knew their role in it, and heaven forbid people actually used it to make decisions. As with most things, people like me who love strategic planning are typically those who also love lists. Therefore, I have come up with my own "Top Ten" list for effective strategic planning.

## 1. Strategic planning is a PROCESS, not an EVENT

Strategic planning is not something you do as a single event. Rather, it is a part of a continuous improvement process. It never ends. It is not something you do, check off the list, and then move on to something else.

## 2. Keep it SIMPLE

When done correctly, strategic planning is not simple. It is actually very comprehensive and complex. However, in order to effectively develop it, communicate it, and weave it into the fabric of your organization, you need to adopt a simple framework that everyone can easily understand. We believe that the entire process can be broken down into five essential questions as follows:

- Who are we?

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How will we know when we have arrived?
- How do we plan to get there?

## 3. Involve ALL stakeholders

Effective strategic planning is not done in isolation. This one cannot be over emphasized. Stakeholders need to be involved early and often. Don't wait until you have already developed a plan to engage them. Make them a part of the process before, during and after. After all, the stakeholders are the ones that you will have to depend on to implement the plan.

## 3.5 Measurable Results (slipped this in so it would hit a "round 10. See if anyone notices!)

Your plan must include measurable results. We call them "Performance Measures". If not, then people will never know when the goal has been achieved.

## 4. Accountability

People are the ones who get things done. If your plan does not get down to the point of having specific people responsible for initiatives within your plan, then the work will never get done because nobody will have ownership in it.

## 5. Due Dates

Without an agreed due date, there is a good chance the work will never get done. Setting due dates help prioritize the work and provides the framework for allocating resources to get things done.

## 6. Costs

All initiatives have a cost, whether hard or soft. If they are not defined, then it is likely that they will not be planned for in your budgeting process. Nothing can be more frustrating than going through the planning process only to find out that the things you said were important have not been accounted for in the budget.

Budgeting is not separate from the strategic planning process, it is actually a part of it. Budgets are where you put your money where your mouth is. If your strategic plan says one thing but your budget says something entirely different, then you have a problem.

## 7. Align it

Your strategic plan cannot be separate from everything else. The strategic plan comes first and then everything else you do must be aligned back to it. This should include things like your budget, operational plans, school improvement plans, project plans, meetings (both board and staff meetings), policies, evaluations, etc. If it's not aligned then you should be asking yourself...why are we doing it?

## 8. Communicate it

You simply can't over-communicate. Communicating the plan has to be done in multiple ways to engage and inform all stakeholders. Everyone should know what the plan is and what their role is in executing it. Find out how your various stakeholders prefer to receive information and try to meet them where they are.

## 9. Track it

If you have no way to track it, then even the best of plans can fall to the wayside simply because it became too complicated or too time-consuming to keep up with it. Tools are now out there to automate and streamline this process...use them!

## 10. Live it

For it to be labeled as "effective" planning, it must produce "effective" results. Planning has to become a part of the culture and climate of your organization. It has to be infused in everything you do and it should start from the top. If the board and leadership team "live it", then it is more likely that people at all levels of the organization will too.

Strategic planning when done right is not easy. It takes a lot of time and hard work. There are no shortcuts. However, once embedded into the culture and climate of an organization, it does get easier as it becomes "the way" you do things. And most importantly, it DOES produce transformational results.

Well, there you have it. These are my top tips for effective strategic planning. If you have others, please share them so we can all learn from each other.

Center for Public Education

# cpe

# Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards

*Chuck Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien*

AN **nsba** PUBLICATION

# Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards

More than 90,000 men and women are members of local school boards in the United States, all serving as important trustees of the nation's public education systems. According to the National School Boards Association, these public officials serve on 13,809 elected or appointed boards in the U.S.

Most of the public knows that school boards do things like set the budgets, establish school boundaries and set school policies. But does school boards' work affect student achievement? The higher media visibility of teachers and principals in the push for better learning, while important, has led some to question whether school boards matter.

From a research perspective, it's a complex question. Isolating what makes an effective board—that is, one that impacts student achievement—involves evaluating virtually all functions of a board, from internal governance and policy formulation to communication with teachers, building administrators, and the public.

But the answer is: Yes, they do. In this research brief, NSBA's Center for Public Education looks at indicators of school board effectiveness. From this research, it is clear that school boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-achieving districts. In the most dramatic examples from this research, scholars compared districts with similar levels of poverty and disadvantage to determine factors that separate high-performing districts from those with low performance. In many cases, these differences included the approaches taken by local school boards.

So what do these boards do? Here are some examples:

- Boards in high-achieving districts are more likely to engage in goal setting and monitoring their progress.

- They are increasingly data savvy—identifying student needs and justifying decisions based on data.

- Board members possess detailed knowledge of their district, including initiatives to jump-start success.

- Board members have crafted a working relationship with superintendents, teachers, and administrators based on mutual respect, collegiality and a joint commitment to student success.

For the full list of eight characteristics of effective school boards, keep reading.

## Background on the studies

Despite the pivotal role of school boards in the nation's educational framework, comparatively few studies focused on the practices and effectiveness of elected or appointed boards. As Sam Stringfield and Deborah Land noted in their 2002 study, *Educating At-Risk Students*, "quantitative and qualitative studies of board effectiveness are virtually non-existent," (Land and Stringfield, National Society for the Study of Education, 2002). Nonetheless, while there may be no magic bullet to assess boards comprised of individuals with divergent views, there is a consistent body of research examining the characteristics and practices of effective school boards. (For the purpose of this paper, effective boards are those operating in high-achieving districts, particularly those that are making significant strides despite serving large numbers of disadvantaged students.)

Much of the research cited here focuses on school board/district practices and approaches gleaned through interviews, surveys, observations and qualitative measures rather than in-depth quantitative information. Several studies also date back to the early 2000s or earlier; as a result, the data have limitations.

Nonetheless, the research base now includes notable studies comparing the practices of boards in high-achieving districts and contrasting those with practices of boards in lower-achieving districts. Several of these include detailed case studies exploring the evolution of districts from low performing to high achieving—a process that includes discussion of the school board role. In addition, scholars have used quantitative methods to assess the effect of district leadership on student achievement; often, this assessment includes data and trends related to school board operation, thus providing rich details on the evolution and, in some cases, transformation of local boards.

Taken together, these reports provide a sound basis to explore the role played by school boards in student achievement. The pertinent studies for this paper fall into three general areas:

- Meta-analyses of education research, with a focus on the practices of boards, superintendents, and other school leaders;

- Case studies of high-achieving districts, with a focus on the evolving role of school boards; and

- Studies that compare school board practices in districts with similar demographics but substantially different student outcomes as reflected by annual assessments and other factors.

*Meta-Analysis*: In 2006, J. Timothy Waters and Robert Marzano of Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) examined 27 studies since 1970 that, they concluded, included rigorous quantitative methods to assess the effect of school district leadership on student achievement. Their analysis, *School District Leadership That Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement: Meta-analysis of Influence of District Administrators on Student Achievement*, looked at more than two

dozen studies covering more than 2,800 districts and 3.4 million students. Of the 27 studies examined, 14 had information about the relationship between district leadership and average student academic achievement.

*Case Studies*: Several studies on district leadership focus at least in part on board activities. The Learning First Alliance study, *Beyond Islands of Excellence*, (Togneri and Anderson, 2003), examined the practices in five school districts with high student test scores despite moderate to high student poverty levels. Districts in the study were Aldine, Tex., Independent School District; Chula Vista, Calif., Elementary School District; Kent County Public Schools in Maryland; Minneapolis, Minn., Public Schools, and Providence, R.I., Public Schools.

Also, a study of 10 districts in five states, *Getting There from Here* (Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman, 1997), sought to identify the effect of quality governance on student achievement. Included in the analysis was an examination of the relationship between school board and superintendent and characteristics of effective board leadership. Researchers selected the districts to reflect diversity in size, geography, student achievement, graduation rates, dropout rates, board/superintendent relations and race/ethnic factors.

## EIGHT CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision

2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.

3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.

4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.

5. Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.

6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.

7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.

8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.

*Studies with Comparison Districts*: One of the richest data sets available is the Lighthouse I study of the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB). Looking at similar districts with either unusually high or unusually low records on student achievement, the project examined the role of boards and how they relate to student achievement. In studying Georgia districts, Lighthouse I contrasted the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of school board members from high- and low performing districts. Since conducting this original study in 1998-2000, IASB has expanded the project into an action research approach, identifying pilot districts in Iowa for further testing of this concept (Lighthouse II) and launching a multi-state project focused on board leadership (Lighthouse III). Multiple Lighthouse research papers were cited in this report, including *The Lighthouse Inquiry: School Board/Superintendent Team Behaviors in School Districts with Extreme Differences in Student Achievement* (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2001), *The Lighthouse Re-*

*search: Past, Present and Future: School Board Leadership for Improving Student Achievement* (Iowa School Boards Foundation, 2007) and in the Thomas Alsbury-edited *The Future of School Board Governance: Relevancy and Revelation* (2008).

In addition, *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement* (MDRC for Council of Great City Schools, 2002) examined what it termed "fast-moving" urban districts and compared them with slower-moving districts of similar size and demographics. In selecting the districts, researchers looked for cities with improvement in reading and math in more than half of their grades through spring 2001. Districts also had to achieve growth rates faster than their respective states and narrow racial achievement gaps. The project ultimately focused on Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the Houston Independent School District, the Sacramento, Calif., United School District, and a subset of New York City schools known as the Chancellor's District. One key research question was to examine district-level strategies used to improve student achievement and reduce racial achievement disparities. Several of these strategies involved school boards.

Finally, a 1993 report on school leadership in British Columbia, Canada, *The Politics of Excellence: Trustee Leadership and School District Ethos*, concluded that districts with a productive "ethos" produced higher-than-expected student achievement and lower-than-expected costs over time (LaRocque and Coleman, 1993). The role of the board was part of this district "ethos."

In reviewing these studies, it is reasonable to conclude that school boards in high-achieving school districts look different, and that they often feature characteristics and approaches that differ, from those in lower-achieving districts.

## Eight characteristics of effective boards

### 1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.

In comparing district leadership and student achievement, Waters and Marzano (2006) identified five specific district leadership responsibilities that positively correlated with student achievement:

- Establishing a collaborative process to set goals;

- Establishing "non-negotiable goals" (that is, goals all staff must act upon once set by the board) in at least two areas: student achievement and classroom instruction;

- Having the board align with and support district goals;

- Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction; and

- Using resources to support achievement and instruction goals.

"Publicly adopting broad five-year goals for achievement and instruction and consistently supporting these goals, both publicly and privately, are examples of board-level actions that we found to be positively correlated with student achievement," they said. Typically, they adopted the goals with specific achievement targets and benchmarks. "The board ensures that these goals remain the top priorities in the district and that no

other initiatives detract attention or resources from accomplishing these goals." The districts also provided professional development to board members and examined the effectiveness of such training.

In *Beyond Islands of Excellence*, Togneri and Anderson (2003) provided examples of the positive effects of goal setting. In its case studies, the majority of high-achieving districts adopted specific goals and boards adopted policies to consistently support them. At three case study sites—Kent County, Md., Minneapolis, and Providence—boards adopted broad strategic plans that contained both goals and the action steps needed to attain them. To assess progress on a regular basis, Kent County and Minneapolis also added indicators of success to the plan so board members could review gains or address challenges.

Each district also adopted what Togneri and Anderson termed a simply stated vision of student success. For goals on student achievement, board members identified brief, one-line vision statements such as "All our students will achieve on grade level" and used them in public and staff presentations. Significantly, the report said, school boards and superintendents also carefully examined how to stretch limited dollars to focus sufficient funding on the goals.

The Lighthouse I studies (2001, 2007) also offer important details about the importance of identifying goals. In high-achieving districts, board members adopted goals and had detailed knowledge about their relationship to curriculum, instruction, assessment and staff development. As a result, these public officials could identify not only the purposes and processes behind school improvement initiatives but also the board's role in supporting these efforts. By comparison in low-achieving districts, board members were "only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives," researchers noted. "They were sometimes aware of goals, but seldom able to describe actions being taken by staff members to improve learning."

Notably, these differences extended down to the staff level. In high-achieving districts, staff members could link the school board's goals to building-level goals for student learning and explain how the goals impacted classrooms. "Staff members identified clear goals for improvement, described how staff development supported the goals, and how they were monitoring progress based on data about student learning." By comparison in the low-achieving districts, "There was little evidence of a pervasive focus on school renewal at any level when it was not present at the board level."

**2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.**

In the Lighthouse I studies (2001, 2007), board members consistently expressed their belief in the learning ability of all children and gave specific examples of ways that learning had improved as a result of district initiatives. Poverty, lack of parental involvement and other factors were described as challenges to be overcome, not as excuses. Board members expected to see improvements in student achievement quickly as a result of initiatives. Comments made by board members in Lighthouse were indicative of the differences. In a high-achieving district, one board member noted, "This is a place for all kids to excel." Another board member noted, "Sometimes people say the poor students have limits. I say all kids have limits. I believe we have not reached the limits of any of the kids in our system."

Yet in low-achieving districts, board members frequently referred to external pressures as the main rea-

sons for lack of student success. Board members often focused on factors that they believed kept students from learning, such as poverty, lack of parental support, societal factors, or lack of motivation. Board members expected it would take years to see any improvements in student achievement. For these board members, the reasons for pursuing change often were simple ones—to meet state mandates (and avoid sanctions) and a desire to not "have the lowest test scores" in the state.

In addition, board members in low-achieving districts offered many negative comments about students and teachers when they were interviewed by Lighthouse researchers. Said one, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink. This applies to both students and staff."

In one low-performing district, teachers made 67 negative comments about students and their parents during Lighthouse interviews. In a similar number of interviews in a high-performing district, there were only four such comments.

### 3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.

According to Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman (1997), another characteristic of quality governance is the ability to focus on student achievement while spending comparatively little time on day-to-day operational issues. In interviews with hundreds of board members and staff across the districts, they found that high-performing boards focus on establishing a vision supported by policies that target student achievement. Yet poor governance is characterized by factors such as micro-management by the board; confusion of the appropriate roles for the board member and superintendent; interpersonal conflict between board chair and superintendent; and board member disregard for the agenda process and the chain of command.

Case studies of individual districts in other studies support many of these findings. In Chula Vista, Calif., the board took its policy role seriously and developed policies that supported instructional reform. As profiled in Togneri and Anderson (2003), the focus began when top administrators recognized a need for a new cadre of exceptional principals and asked the school board for help. In response, the board approved a policy with higher salaries for principals, giving the district more leverage to attract quality candidates to the district. Later, the board granted the central office greater flexibility to provide principal raises and bonuses. Members also supported the superintendent in dismissing principals who did not meet performance standards; this smaller but still significant action reflected the policy and partnership approach adopted earlier by the board.

Other case studies in this report were replete with examples of board commitment to policy and accountability, something often reflected through visions and strategic plans. In Aldine, Tex., board members made sure to adopt strategic plans that placed children's learning needs front and center. As one Aldine board member explained, "Everything we do is based on what's best for the children, period. Whether you are dealing with an administrative issue or a student issue, we ask, 'What's best for the children?'"

With everyone on board to promote achievement, boards encouraged their staffs to tackle difficult issues and seek innovative solutions. As a result, the districts engaged in a collegial policy-making process that emphasized the need to find solutions. An administrator in Kent County, Md., summed up the board's work as follows: "The board recognizes its role as a policy-maker. [Board members] are very professional.

They never humiliate each other. They have no hidden agendas. The goal is what is best for the children."

Boards held the superintendent and his or her colleagues accountable for progress but did not engage in the daily administration of schools. Explained one board member: "I am not a professional educator.... [The superintendent and her staff ] are the professionals, and we say to them, 'These are the results we want to see; you are in charge of how to do it.'"

Likewise, Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlihy's case studies (2002) include similar findings. The groups concluded that fast-moving districts had developed a consensus among board members and other leaders on the identification and implementation of improvement strategies. This required a new role for the school board, which focused on decisions "that support improved student achievement rather than on the day-to-day operations of the district."

In Lighthouse II (2007), researchers identified five pilot school districts and provided technical assistance and support to the boards based on research findings documented in Lighthouse I.

Results from this study also showed that districts made gains when they were able to focus on achievement rather than administrative issues. In the majority of districts, boards spent more than double the amount of time on policy and student achievement than they did prior to Lighthouse II. It was also common for these districts to schedule additional work sessions on student achievement. (More information on Lighthouse II is in the sidebar on the next page).

## A DOZEN DANGER SIGNS

While this paper did not specifically focus on characteristics of ineffective school boards, it may be helpful to review some of the descriptions of ineffective boards mentioned in the research:

1. Only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives, and seldom able to describe actions being taken to improve student learning

2. Focused on external pressures as the main reasons for lack of student success, such as poverty, lack of parental support, societal factors, or lack of motivation

3. Offer negative comments about students and teachers

4. Micro-manage day-to-day operations

5. Disregard the agenda process and the chain of command

6. Left out the information flow; little communication between board and superintendent

7. Quick to describe a lack of parent interest in education or barriers to community outreach

8. Looked at data from a "blaming" perspective, describing teachers, students, and families as major causes for low performance

9. Little understanding or coordination on staff development for teachers

10. Slow to define a vision

11. Did not hire a superintendent who agreed with their vision

12. Little professional development together as aboard

**4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.**

The Lighthouse I studies are particularly relevant in conveying this theme. Looking across high- and low-achieving districts in Georgia, school board members in high achieving districts had strong communication between the superintendent, staff, and each other. They received information from many sources including the superintendent, curriculum director, principals, teachers, and sources outside the district. While the superintendent was a primary source of information, he or she was not the only source. In addition, findings and research were shared among all board members. By comparison, in low-achieving districts, board members expressed concern that not all information was shared or shared equally. As a result, researchers said, "Some felt left out of the information flow."

In high-achieving districts, school board members could provide specific examples of how they connected and listened to the community, and were able to identify concrete ways they promoted this involvement. Likewise, staff members in these districts described the boards as supportive, noting that these public officials "would respect and listen to them." In interviews, board members were quick to note how they communicated actions and goals to staff. One strategy was to schedule post-board meetings to provide teachers and administrators with in-depth briefings on policy decisions.

By comparison, school boards in

## CONVERTING RESEARCH TO ACTION: LIGHTHOUSE II

Building on the success of Lighthouse I—which identified the different knowledge, beliefs and actions of school boards in high-achieving districts—the Iowa Association of School Boards expanded the initiative to begin embedding these ideas in other jurisdictions.

Under Lighthouse II, from 2002 to 2007, IASB identified five pilot districts in Iowa and offered technical assistance and support to the board, superintendent, and, at some sites, district leadership teams. The goal was to move entire districts from one set of assumptions, beliefs and practices to another: the set possessed by the high-achieving districts in Lighthouse I. After five years of work, the project showed significant gains:

- In three of the five districts, the time spent on policy and student achievement during regular board meetings increased from 16 percent to 37 percent.
- By the end of the project, boards in all five districts regularly scheduled extra time for boards to focus on student achievement.
- Four of the sites showed significant increases—some as high as 90 percent—in the number of staff and board members who could consistently describe the district's school improvement goals.
- At all sites, 83 percent to 100 percent of all staff and board members reported a clear, district-wide focus on improving literacy.
- All districts, by year 3 of the project, agreed strongly that local school boards can positively affect student achievement.
- By year 3, significant gains on a measure of reading comprehension were seen at every grade level in one district. In addition, in the fourth year of the study, four of the five sites showed statistically significant gains in student reading and/or math for at least two grade levels on the statewide norm-referenced measure of achievement.

Starting in 2008, IASB launched the Lighthouse III project, through which the association is working with several states to outline best practices for school boards and state school board associations.

low-achieving districts were likely to cite communication and outreach barriers. They were quick to describe a lack of parent interest in education; in fact, they were able to list only a few efforts to solicit community involvement. Compared with board members from high-achieving districts, they frequently noted frustration with the lack of community involvement and said there was little they could do about it. As for relationships within the district, staff members from the comparison low-achieving districts contacted for the research often said they didn't know the board members at all.

While such findings perhaps could be limited to high- and low-achieving districts in Georgia, other research highlights similar findings. Similar factors were evident in Waters and Marzano's 2006 meta-analysis of 27 studies. In this study, the authors found that high-achieving districts actively involved board members and community stakeholders in setting goals.

While individual board members did pursue their own issues, the researchers said, there was a reluctance to place these issues at center stage. "When individual board member interests and expectations distract from board-adopted achievement and instructional goals, they are not contributing to district success, but in fact, may be working in opposition to that end." School board members realized, the authors noted, that these issues can be a distraction from core district goals.

### 5. Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.

In the Lighthouse I study, board members in high-achieving districts identified specific student needs through data, and justified decisions based on that data. In addition, board members were not shy about discussing trends on dropout rates, test scores, and student needs, with many seeking such information on a regular or monthly basis.

By comparison, board members in low-achieving districts tended to greet data with a "blaming" perspective, describing teachers, students and families as major causes for low performance. In one district, the superintendent "controls the reaction of the board to recommendations by limiting the information he gives to them." The Lighthouse I study contrasts this with the policy of a high-performance district, where the superintendent "believes sharing information will get them to react and encourage engagement." Board members in this district view data as a diagnostic tool, without the emotional response of assessing blame.

Board members in lower-performing districts also provided little evidence of considering data in the decision making process. In these districts, board members frequently discussed their decisions through anecdotes and personal experiences rather than by citing data. In many cases, the study noted, "The board talked very generally about test scores and relied on the interpretation made by the superintendent." As a result, board members believed the superintendent "owned" information, leaving it to the top administrator to interpret the data and recommend solutions.

Togneri and Anderson (2003) also emphasized how effective school boards embraced data. Boards in high-achieving districts were not afraid to confront negative data and, in fact, used it as a basis to improve teaching and learning. In Minneapolis, a renewed emphasis on data has helped drive improvement. Yet back in the mid-1990s, the district showed a wide achievement gap between white and minority students and posted a high school graduation rate barely above 40 percent. When the city's Chamber of Commerce

failed to support the school board's request for a tax increase, the board began a fundamental rethinking based on goals and data. It hired a new superintendent with a strong foundation in instructional improvement. Together, the board and superintendent developed goals and performance indicators to rank and monitor school progress. This process ultimately helped build trust among school and community leaders, eventually leading to district progress and, later, successful new tax proposals beneficial to schools.

Minneapolis was typical of the report's study districts, which "had the courage to acknowledge poor performance and the will to seek solutions." With the board, superintendent and community supporting the new process, the district developed a vision focused on student learning and instructional improvement with system-wide curricula connected to state standards with clear expectations for teachers.

### 6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.

Successful boards recognize the need to support high priorities even during times of fiscal uncertainty. One leading example is in providing professional development for teachers, administrators and other staff. According to LaRocque and Coleman (1993), effective boards saw a responsibility to maintain high standards even in the midst of budget challenges. "To this end, the successful boards supported extensive professional development programs for administrators and teachers, even during times of [fiscal] restraint," they wrote in *The Politics of Excellence: Trustee Leadership and School District Ethos.*

Lighthouse I researchers (2001, 2007) also identified research-based professional development for staff as one of seven "conditions for improvement" typically evident in high-achieving districts. From the board's perspective, members did not simply provide funding for such professional development – they could cite specific examples of activities and their link to improvement plans. "In high-achieving districts, board members described staff development activities in the district and could describe the link between teacher training and board or district goals for students," the study noted. "Board members described a belief in the importance of staff development activities focused on student needs."

In low-achieving districts, however, board members said teachers made their own decisions on staff development based on perceived needs in the classroom or for certification. "Board members knew there was a budget for staff development but were unsure whether there was a plan for staff development," the study noted. In fact, board members frequently made "disparaging remarks" about staff development, calling it an ineffective strategy.

Lighthouse II, as noted in Alsbury (2008) further reinforced this point. Boards not only took an active interest in professional development but also provided the infrastructure for such programming to succeed. "For most boards, this required significant changes in the allocation of resources (people, time and money) and would not have happened without a clear understanding of the characteristics of quality professional development and a belief in the importance of improving the knowledge and skills of educators in order to improve student outcomes."

Additional evidence is available in the Snipes, Doolittle and Herlihy's 2002 analysis of high- and low-achieving districts. In high-achieving districts, the board and superintendent support uniform professional development built on curriculum. In lower-achieving districts, professional development may vary extensively

from school to school. One example was in Sacramento, Calif., where teachers received at least 18 hours of in-service training per year based on uniform curricula. New teachers also received six full days of instructional training, and teachers had common planning periods to encourage collaboration on lesson plans and strategies to address student needs. In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., schools, weeklong seminars for Advanced Placement teachers, leadership retreats for principals and financial support for attaining national board certification were among effective strategies by the district to improve curriculum.

Waters and Marzano (2006) also touts the importance of professional development. While not specifically examining the school board role in this process, this study on leadership notes that "a meaningful commitment of funding must be dedicated to professional development for teachers and principals. This professional development should be focused on building the knowledge, skills and competencies teachers and principals need to accomplish a district's goals."

**7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.**

In *Getting There from Here*, Goodman and colleagues (1997) concluded that those with a strong board/superintendent relationship had greater student achievement as measured by dropout rates, the percentage of students going to college, and aptitude test scores. Goodman's review of characteristics of quality governance included several that were directly related to school boards and their relationships:

- A trusting and collaborative relationship between the board and superintendent;

- Creation by the board of conditions and organizational structures that allowed the superintendent to function as the chief executive officer and instructional leader of the district;

- Evaluation of the superintendent according to mutually agreed upon procedures; and

- Effective communication between the board chair and superintendent and among board members.

Likewise, Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlihy (2002) also emphasizes the importance of these factors. In successful districts, boards defined an initial vision for the district and sought a superintendent who matched this vision. Nowhere was this truer than in Sacramento, Calif., one of the case study sites. In 1996, a mayor's commission concluded that the city schools, beset with high superintendent turnover and other problems, had "a lack of accountability and deplorable building conditions." A group of individuals focused on progress won seats on the school board, and they quickly bought out the contract of the old superintendent and hired one sharing their views. The new superintendent and board sought input from thousands of community stakeholders and ultimately adopted an action plan with specific achievement benchmarks based on student assessments such as the SAT-9. The board and superintendent also established seven "vital signs" of success, including high rates of kindergarten readiness; a student attendance rate of at least 95 percent; increased proficiency of English Language Learners; and objectives that at least 90 percent of students attain math and reading proficiency and graduate high school. Within four years, the district saw consistent gains in math and reading plus a drop in the disparity between white and Hispanic student achievement.

In contrast to this "moving" district, comparison districts had no such impetus to work toward success. Boards were slow to define a vision and often recruited a superintendent with his or her own ideas and

platform. The differences between the districts only increased over time, as boards and superintendents in high-achieving districts jointly refined their visions over time, assessed district strengths and weaknesses and had all signs of a stable relationship. By comparison, less successful districts featured boards and superintendents that were not in alignment, as the superintendent "may develop solutions without board involvement." Such boards also may not hold superintendents accountable for goals.

**8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts.**

Board member development and training is a clear theme within this research base. In high-achieving Lighthouse I study districts (2001), school board members said they regularly participated in activities in which they learned together as a group. They cited frequent work and study sessions with opportunities for inquiry and discussion prior to making a final decision. In low-achieving districts, however, board members said they did not learn together except when the superintendent or other staff members made presentations of data.

Other studies focused on this subject as well, sometimes within the context of the responsibilities of an effective superintendent. In the 2006 Waters and Marzano meta-analysis, for example, one key goal for superintendents is to produce an environment in which the board is aligned with and supportive of district goals. The study suggests that supporting board members' professional development is one of several ways that superintendents can help realize this goal.

In their study on effective governance, Goodman and colleagues (1997) emphasized in detail the importance of formal training for board members. They recommended orientation workshops for new members soon after their election. Their "sample policy statement" on orientation included a commitment by the board and administrative staff to help all new members learn board functions, policies and procedures. Chief responsibility for orientation should reside with the superintendent and board chair, they noted, but this work should include meetings with top administrative personnel to examine services, policies, and programs. As a guide, the report cited policies in Kentucky requiring a specific number of hours of training for board members based on their experience. This ranged from a high of 12 hours of annual training for board members with zero to three years experience to four hours a year for those with at least eight years of board service. Emphasizing the importance of the board/superintendent relationship, the study also recommended that superintendents participate in orientation and development workshops alongside their board members.

Elsewhere, two of the effective districts in the Togneri and Anderson (2003) study utilized formal training and professional development for school board members. In Kent County, Md., the board adopted the Baldrige in Education process, which created a strong working relationship among the central office, board, principal and teachers. In Minneapolis, the school board engaged in the Carver method, which emphasizes the board's role in establishing goals, setting indicators, aligning resources to goals, monitoring progress, and communicating with the public.

Finally, LaRocque and Coleman (1993) illustrated the value of both formal and informal learning activities for board members. According to these researchers, effective school districts in Canada offered a mixture of learning activities for their board members, or "trustees," including retreats, special meetings, work

sessions, school visits and even social events. As a result, the trustees had a "willingness to meet regularly with the professionals in the district to discuss what was happening and what should be happening." This commitment conveyed to staff the importance of district goals and the importance of the staff members' work in supporting them. In addition, they noted, "The successful boards did not just rely on district staff reports…They obtained information about programs in different ways and from different sources, and sought opportunities to interact directly with administrators and teachers."

## Related finding: Stability of leadership

In the 2002 Snipes et. al study, researchers noted that fast-moving districts had political and organizational stability, as evidenced by low rates of school board and superintendent turnover. Goodman's research echoed all of these points, concluding two characteristics of high achieving districts were long tenures by superintendents and school board members and regular retreats by senior staff and board members for evaluation and goal setting purposes.

Similarly, Togneri and Anderson (2003) note the long tenure of board members and superintendents in high-achieving districts. "They set their courses and stayed with them for years," the study said. Among the five successful districts profiled, superintendents in three districts had been at their jobs for at least eight years. In most of those profiled, the majority of board members had been serving in that capacity for 10 or more years. "That continuity allowed superintendents and boards to grow together in their approaches to change and to better understand each other's work."

## Conclusion

During the past 15 years, a number of research studies have begun to document the value that school boards and their members add to the development of an effective public education system. This fledgling base of research provides a foundation for boards and other policymakers. The research also is timely, since it coincides with a period in U.S. public policy that has focused substantially greater attention on accountability in public education. Much of this research has contrasted boards in low-performing and high-performing districts, thereby providing best practices for new and veteran board members nationwide. While there is a need for additional research—a study on boards in districts with mid-range achievement might be one useful step—it is increasingly clear that board members in high-performing districts have attitudes, knowledge and approaches that separate them from their counterparts in lower-achieving districts.

Based on the studies included in this report, it is clear that school boards in high-achieving districts hold a high, shared vision about the capabilities of both students and staff—they believe that more is possible and are motivated to improve results for students. They are policy and accountability driven, focusing their time and energy on governance-level actions related to student achievement and classroom instruction. They engage in goal-setting processes that can drive action in the district to improve. They align resources—including staff professional development—around those goals. They are data savvy—using data to both diagnose problems and to monitor and drive continuous improvement efforts. They communicate with and engage staff and community and work well together as a team and in collaborative leadership with their superintendents. And, they commit to their own learning, building the knowledge and skills it takes to govern during a period of educational reform.

In this era of fiscal constraints and a national environment focused on accountability, boards in high-performing districts can provide an important blueprint for success. In the process, they can offer a road map for boards in lower-achieving school districts nationwide.

# About CPE

The Center for Public Education is a national resource for credible and practical information about public education and its importance to the well-being of our nation. CPE provides up-to-date research, data, and analysis on current education issues and explores ways to improve student achievement and engage public support for public schools. CPE is an initiative of the National School Boards Association.

**nsba.org/CPE**

Founded in 1940, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) is a not-for-profit organization representing state associations of school boards and their more than 90,000 local school board members throughout the U.S. Working with and through our state associations, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board leadership.

**nsba.org**