

Board & Administrator

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Set a 10-year board agenda to focus on the future

When setting the agenda for board meetings, keep the image of an automobile road trip in your mind. Do you want the board's attention focused on the of the road's surface or concentrating on what is ahead as you journey toward a planned destination?

Board consultant and long-term school board member Rick Maloney said there can be a real problem with agenda planning if the superintendent and board are too focused on the details of the surface of the road they are traveling. The board/superintendent team need to take a 360-degree view of the route there are traveling to take the school district to the desired destination, he said.

"Consider the image of a group of people steering with six pairs of hands on the steering wheel-five board members and the superintendent," Maloney said. That approach leaves the team too focused on details of driving, he said.

A better approach is to set a 10-year plan for the district and keep your attention on that plan.

To do this set a board agenda for the next 10 years that delivers educational achievement, Maloney said. "This 10-year agenda should contain only the long-range big ideas about the results the board wants for students," Maloney said.

To support this longer-term board agenda, the board and superintendent should lay out a board agenda for each year. "This should contain check points and action points throughout the year, so that you aren't just scheduling the next meeting's agenda items on-the-fly, or even worse, asking the board to respond to the superintendent's whims about the next meeting agenda items on-the-fly," Maloney said.

"Each meeting agenda should ensure that the board and superintendent are steering the vehicle in the desired direction," Maloney said.

When considering a board agenda for a full 10 years, concentrate on the desired results of student learning, Maloney said. Ask the questions that get at what student achievement should look like, without including discussion of the necessary programs, infrastructure, buildings, or curricula at this point, he said. "It should look like a strategic plan that delivers the desired results of student learning," he said.

Tips for building a 10-year board agenda

- Identify, in detail, what the board deems appropriate and what students ought to know and be able to do in the next 10 years. Use the district's current strategic plan in this board work by extracting information pertinent to students, Maloney said. Or spend retreat time board to come up with a draft agenda.
- Build in a review of the ten-year agenda each year. "This agenda needs a comprehensive check-in each year," Maloney said. "This effort establishes and maintains a clear board vision about the long-range destination," he said.
- Do not "refresh" the district's strategic plan if using a 10-year board agenda. "By using an annual check-in, there is no need for a major district strategic planning project to update it for the board," Maloney said.
- Identify the student data checkpoints that fit the one-year plan. "The board's agenda for the year ought to identify, one by one, a selected type

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Examples clarify how a board sets policy

A simple explanation of the board's role is that the board **makes policy** and the **superintendent** and his staff then implement policy.

The board's role then becomes one of monitoring implementation and outcome of policy.

Does your board set policy? Consider these examples to determine the answer:

1. The board sets policy when it approves the district's budget. The superintendent's job is to take this board policy and spend within the budget. That's implementation of board policy. The board examines financial reports to monitor implementation of policy. But the board doesn't tell the superintendent where to shop to find the best deals.

2. The board makes policy when it authorizes a

new program. The superintendent then employs district staff to implement the new program and deliver the desired outcomes. The board monitors implementation of this new program through reports, results, and presentations at meetings. It doesn't get hands-on in delivering the new program to students.

3. The board sets policy when it approves a new personnel policy. The administrator, through district staff, implements the new policy. The board monitors implementation of this new policy through reports, updates, and statistics. If it's a hiring policy, for example, the board can determine its success by asking for reports on employee qualifications, tenure, and turnover. The board doesn't hire staff or teachers, however. That responsibility belongs to the superintendent. ■

FOIA and emergency meetings: Probably won't fly

Attorney Gary R. Brochu in his webinar Board Member Bootcamp: A Guide to Effective Board Meetings makes three points about the Freedom of Information Commission in his state of Connecticut and meetings of the board called to address an emergency situation.

1. Purpose for this type of meeting would only come up when something extremely "pressing" occurs.

2. The meeting could not be noticed 24 hours in advance,

so the board would be meeting without prior notice.

3. Talk to counsel before considering an emergency meeting.

Brochu has reviewed seven Freedom of Information Commission decisions on boards that have called emergency meetings. "I have yet to see an instance where the commission found the purpose of the emergency meeting to be legitimate," he said.

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of student data that describes a chunk of the agenda for the decade," Maloney said.

These pieces of data might be in four big parcels, Maloney said. As just one example: 1) student math/science competencies; 2) student literacy; 3) student character and citizenship competencies; and 4) student physical health and fitness and other academic areas of interest competencies.

"Identify one at a time these competencies and then schedule them to be reviewed in a board meeting devoted to that purpose, so that all four are reviewed by the end of the year," Maloney said.

These chunks might be divided into more than four pieces, perhaps reviewing one at a time in a board meeting devoted to that purpose every two months, Maloney said.

- Schedule professional development to support this agenda.

- Set board meeting time for the year to brief the board on the superintendent's work. "There is an urge for the board to look at programmatic de-

cision-making as the board's area," Maloney said. "This urge should be avoided, so these updates should be treated as the superintendent's opportunity to update the board on superintendent work."

To achieve this concentration on superintendent work, the board's agenda for the year needs to identify meetings when certain programs, curricula, and policies are brought to the board for their informational and educational purpose, Maloney said.

Superintendent work should be advertised as such, Maloney said, so that the input the public gives to the schools can be properly routed to the superintendent and staff for a response.

"It is appropriate for the board to ask that it receive the response, or a copy of the response, but it is not OK for the board to take over and make decisions in this area," Maloney said. "If it does, the board will own the consequences and will be unable or weak in its ability to hold the superintendent responsible for superintendent work."

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