



Texas Association of School Boards  
Leadership Team Services

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# **Moving the Team Forward as a Leadership Body**

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## Moving the Team Forward: The Legal Basis for School Boards

### Subchapter C. Board of Trustees of Independent School District—General Provisions

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*Sec. 11.151. (b) The trustees as a body corporate have the exclusive power and duty to govern and oversee the management of the public schools of the district. All powers and duties not specifically delegated by statute to the agency or to the State Board of Education are reserved for the trustees, and the agency may not substitute its judgment for the lawful exercise of those powers and duties by the trustees.*

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### The Tale of Two Boards: The Oversight Tale

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*Sec. 11.051. (a) An independent school district is governed by a board of trustees who, as a body corporate, shall:*

- (1) oversee the management of the district; and*
  - (2) ensure that the superintendent implements and monitors plans, procedures, programs, and systems to achieve appropriate, clearly defined, and desired results in the major areas of district operations.*
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#### What is Management?

- Putting plans, systems, and procedures, in place to accomplish desired outcomes and priorities
- Monitoring plans, systems, and procedures for effectiveness in accomplishing desired results
- Adjusting plans, systems, and procedures as needed to accomplish desired results

#### What is Oversight of Management?

- Making sure there are clearly articulated desired results and that they are appropriate and clearly defined
- Making sure plans, systems, and procedures designed to achieve desired results are in place
- Making sure the existing plans, systems, and procedures are monitored for effectiveness and changed if necessary

## Distinguishing Oversight from Micromanagement

The difference between appropriate oversight of management by a board and inappropriate micromanagement can often seem like a very fine line. However, there is a fairly good general test one can apply to determine if the board's concerns border on micromanagement.

The general test is as follows:

- In general, if the board's primary concern is with the **presence and effectiveness of management systems** that direct the actions and decisions of staff, the board is probably engaged in a legitimate **oversight** activity.
- In general, if the board's primary concern is with the **actions or performance of an individual staff member** (other than the superintendent) or the handling of an isolated and specific incident, the board may be verging on **micromanagement**.

Although this test does not work in all circumstances, it provides a good starting point to help the board gauge its actions.

## Questions to Help in Board's Oversight Role

- 1) Is there a clearly articulated, desired result in place? Is it appropriate?
- 2) What systems, plans, or procedures does the superintendent have in place to ensure desired results are met?
- 3) How are the systems, plans, or procedures being monitored?
- 4) Are the desired results being met?
- 5) How would failures or inefficiencies in the system get noticed?
- 6) Have failures or inefficiencies in the system been corrected?

## Before you start

### Recognize that:

- Systematic oversight of management is a new way of doing business for many boards and superintendents.
- The whole board must be behind the effort for oversight of management to work.
- For the board to oversee management in this way, the superintendent may have to formalize some management practices.
- This will take some time to develop and fully implement.
- Oversight of management is a big part of the board's job.
- Oversight is a *proactive* process. Some board members may have a tendency to be reactive with regard to overseeing management.

## Building an Oversight System

### Getting started

**A) Identify the most important district operations for the board to oversee.**

Do this by consensus in a discussion between the board and superintendent.

**B) Agree on the expectations or desired results for each of the identified areas.**

The superintendent should suggest performance indicators, may solicit recommendations from staff. The board may suggest some for consideration as well. Ultimately, the board should determine whether the expectations for the area are appropriate and sufficient.

**C) Schedule a time for the superintendent to report on systems and procedures.**

Even a good superintendent may not be able to answer all of the questions (on page 3) fully or right away for each operations area. Allow some time for the superintendent and staff to gather information and outline what is currently being done in that area.

**D) Schedule time on the calendar to review reports.**

Have the superintendent suggest a time when he or she will report results to the board on the areas the team has chosen to track. Data on different areas may need to be reviewed at different times of year, or some may be reported more than once during a year. The board's activity calendar can keep track of when each of the reports will be presented.

**E) Decide when and how problems and adjustments will be reported.**

If the superintendent's management systems uncover failures, inefficiencies, or other problems, the board may wish to be "kept in the loop" about what adjustments are being made to correct the problems. Decide as a team what levels of problems the board would want to know about in between reporting cycles if this is desired, and how this information will be shared.

## **Practice Building an Oversight System**

### **Identify functional areas for oversight (A)**

Decide on the most important district functions for the board to oversee by asking the following:

What are some areas of operation that:

- Have a significant effect on student achievement or other district priorities?
- Require a significant portion of the district's resource?
- Are particularly important to the community?

### **Remember the questions under Questions to Help in Board's Oversight Role**

- Expectations
- System
- Monitoring
- Results
- Problems
- Adjustments

### **Agree on expectations (B)**

- What expectations do we have for this area?

### **Schedule reports**

- What systems and procedures are in place now and what periodic reports could we see to indicate they are working well? **(C)**
- When is the best time to review reports on this operation? **(D)**
- How will we know if there are problems and what adjustments have been made? **(E)**

## The Tale of Two Boards: The Governance Tale

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*Sec. 11.1511. SPECIFIC POWERS AND DUTIES OF BOARD. (a) In addition to powers and duties under Section 11.151 or other law, the board of trustees of an independent school district has the powers and duties provided by Subsection (b).*

*(b) The board shall:*

*(1) seek to establish working relationships with other public entities to make effective use of community resources and to serve the needs of public school students in the community;*

*(2) adopt a vision statement and comprehensive goals for the district and the superintendent and monitor progress toward those goals;*

*(3) establish performance goals for the district concerning:*

*(A) the academic and fiscal performance indicators under Subchapters C, D, and J, Chapter 39; and*

*(B) any performance indicators adopted by the district;*

*(4) ensure that the superintendent:*

*(A) is accountable for achieving performance results;*

*(B) recognizes performance accomplishments; and*

*(C) takes action as necessary to meet performance goals;*

*(5) adopt a policy to establish a district- and campus-level planning and decision-making process as required under Section 11.251;*

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## What is Governance?

**Good governance results in purposeful and meaningful action by the board designed to have far-reaching implications in the school district and in the community.**

Specifically how is this done?

**Providing direction by:**

- Adopting district vision and goals
- Adopting district policies

**Judging accomplishment of goals and effectiveness of policies by:**

- Evaluating superintendent performance
- Assessing district results

## Questions to Help in Board's Governance Role

### Vision

- 1) Are current members of the board and superintendent team guided by the vision statement(s)?
- 2) Does the board have an annual conversation about the meaning of the vision statement(s)? Does it discuss the potential for significant transformation of the district and community as a result from commitment to the vision?

### Goals

- 1) Did the board consider a broad range of district issues and a comprehensive range of student achievements issues before accepting the goals?
- 2) Can the board point to specific, written criteria that will be used to assess whether the district is succeeding in reaching its goals?
- 3) Does the board have goals or are the adopted statements really job targets for the superintendent?
- 4) Does the board have complete and total team investment and commitment to the goals to the point to where the board promotes their accomplishment through all aspects of the board's work?

### Policies

- 1) Does the board understand policies have the effect of statute for the district?
- 2) Does the board understand policies are the guidelines in which we operate to accomplish the goals and mission?

### Performance

- 1) Does the board's evaluation of the superintendent use an instrument and process that first and foremost is focused on the superintendent's success in addressing the board-adopted goals?
- 2) Does the board's activity calendar include reports by the superintendent on actions taken in support of the goals?



## Building a Governance Board with a Focus on Leadership

### Getting Started

- 1) Plant the seeds for having conversations that can have far reaching impact on the community at-large
- 2) Schedule time to have conversations about the principles or core beliefs that guide your decisions. Ask questions like:
  - What spirit should our facilities instill and what do they say about our community?
  - What principles should guide our thinking about school boundaries?
  - What is the role of the larger community in the district and is it really important to our school enterprise?
  - What are the central values the district should embody?
  - What impact on the community at-large do our athletic programs play and should they?
  - What do we want technology to accomplish for us?
- 3) Schedule time to have conversations for thorough goal investigation. Be sure you “interrogate” your goals. That is, ask hard questions about your level of commitment. Useful questions might include:
  - What’s behind the goal and why is it vitally important that it be accomplished?
  - What’s the board willing to commit to accomplish the goal?
  - Will the board make the effort to see how each action it takes does or does not support the goal?
  - What is the benefit to the community at-large in our accomplishing this goal?
  - Will the community care? If not, how do we get the community to care?

### Results

- 1) District vision and goals become purposeful with meaningful results.
- 2) The board utilizes its leadership role and becomes a transformational influence in the development of the community’s culture.
- 3) The board fulfills its statutory duty as written in Section 11 of the Texas Education Code.

## Practice Building a Governance Board with a Focus on Leadership

At a recent goal-setting session in a mid-sized suburban district, the board was discussing its desires for improved student performance in the district going forward. The district has 16,000 students, 20 campuses, and was for many years a “recognized” district in the old accountability system. Many of the elementary campuses were “recognized.” On the whole, the district has achieved solid academic performance from all student groups in the past few years. The community is a demanding one; wanting as much from its schools as possible. As with many suburban districts in Texas, the demographics are changing in two ways: the Hispanic population in the district is increasing at the same time that the income disparity between the more and less affluent patrons of the district is becoming more pronounced. The state’s “targeted revenue” system has resulted in less money per student for the district than in the comparable districts surrounding it. The district, like many in Texas, is facing significant budget cuts in the coming year to make sure its operating budget is balanced.

In the discussion on goals, two members mentioned that they were concerned that the students in Advanced Placement courses, the International Baccalaureate program, and the gifted and talented program in general were not being challenged to the extent they could be. The board members pointed to adequate, but not outstanding, AP results, similar SAT scores among G&T students, and the experiences of their own children in suggesting something more needed to be done to meet the needs of these students. They cited anecdotal evidence that graduates from the district didn’t seem to be applying to or getting into elite colleges in the numbers that they should, given the general level of academic performance in the district.

Another two board members mentioned concerns with the students in the district who were probably not going on to college. For these board members, too little was perhaps being done to assist these students in understanding their options, plotting an appropriate course of study, and working toward certifications through Career and Technology programs that could benefit these students. The superintendent concurred, noting the increasing number of CTE students who did not seem to be completing high school. The district had worked hard in recent years to make sure its Career and Technology Education courses were keyed to the contemporary work world, but the students who could benefit did not seem to be taking advantage of the programs available.

A fifth board member, echoing a point she had made during similar conversations in the past, expressed real concern about the fate of what she called “the big middle,” the large number of students who were neither in advanced programs or CTE. She worried that these students were simply getting lost in the process. “They have no advocates,” she noted. “Are we leaving them behind? Are we doing anything special for them? What’s the impression we are leaving them with when we pay so little attention to their educational experience? Are we providing them the support they need?”

None of the board members took exception to anything anyone said in the discussion. The superintendent largely concurred with the sentiments expressed by all and suggested that the available data probably supported each position. But the discussion seemed to be headed toward a standoff over the allocation of resources and attention when resources—staff and otherwise—were at a premium.

Imagine you were a member of this board. This board is reacting to perceptions and to a considerable extent to data relevant to the issues. Is there a way for this board to take the lead in transforming the district in a substantive way that will meet all needs? What is the desire behind each of the positions the various members of the board hold? What is their real goal for the district? How can this board become a leadership board?

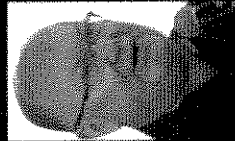
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