

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

August 2013 Vol. 27, No. 04

Editor: Jeff Stratton

Spend time on the board's relationship with the superintendent

In *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards*, the Center for Public Education emphasized the importance of a high quality board-superintendent relationship to a successful district.

In its report, the CPE points out that effective boards lead the district as a united team with their superintendent: "In successful districts, boards defined an initial vision for the district and sought a superintendent who matched this vision. In contrast, in stagnant districts, boards were slow to define a vision and often recruited a superintendent with his or her own ideas and platform, leading the board and superintendent to not be in alignment."

Here are some relationship-building tips the board and superintendent team can benefit from:

- Remember that the board sets policy and governs while the superintendent leads and manages.

- Watch what you say in public.
- Practice "No surprises." The best surprise is no surprise.
- Know and understand existing policy.
- Let the superintendent advise the board.
- Let the superintendent handle day-to-day decision-making.
- Refer complaints to the superintendent.
- Share information among team members.
- Keep confidential information confidential.
- Understand that board-staff relations are sensitive.
- Create a set of operating procedures for the board.

For information, <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards/default.aspx>. ■

Survey: Boards employ sound governance practices

Data from *Board & Administrator's Annual Survey of School Boards* show that in the B&A readership, 90 percent of boards have both a code of ethics and a conflict of interest policy. That is terrific.

One area where boards can look to improve their governance practices is in the area of a school board self-appraisal.

Only 44 percent of boards perform an annual self-evaluation, while 38 percent do not ever evaluate their own performance. ■

| Boards w/ code of ethics | | % of responses | Boards w/ conflict of interest policy | | % of responses |
|--------------------------|-----|----------------|---------------------------------------|-----|----------------|
| Yes | 94 | 90% | Yes | 94 | 90% |
| No | 11 | 10% | No | 10 | 10% |
| Total | 105 | 100% | Total | 104 | 100% |

| Frequency of board self-appraisal | | % of responses | Frequency of superintendent's evaluation | | % of responses |
|-----------------------------------|-----|----------------|--|-----|----------------|
| Annually | 45 | 44% | Annually | 96 | 93% |
| Every 2-3 yrs. | 19 | 18% | Every 2-3 yrs. | 4 | 4% |
| Never | 39 | 38% | Other | 3 | 3% |
| Total | 103 | 100% | Total | 103 | 100% |

Guidelines for board policy development

Below find some guidelines that can help a board develop strategies on creating policy.

Board Policy Development

Policy: Board policy will establish the long-term vision and direction for the school district, set the framework for system operations and communicate the board's values and beliefs.

Guidelines:

1. Policies of the board will be consistent with relevant federal and state legislation and related regulations.
2. All policies of the board will be developed and implemented according to this policy.
3. Policies will be developed using a common format comprising:
 - a) A policy statement: The policy statement should be a philosophically based statement that is goal-oriented and establishes directions or parameters for future action.
 - b) Guidelines: Guidelines further define the policy framework and/or establish parameters within which the policy is to be implemented. Guidelines should provide clear, concise statements that define in precise terms what the board wants done relative to the policy direction. Guidelines may include the delega-

tion of board responsibilities to the superintendent or to committees of the board.

4. Administrative procedures: The superintendent is responsible for developing the specific implementation steps required to put a board policy into operation. Administrative procedures are not subject to board approval but are available to the board for information at the time of policy approval and thereafter on an ongoing basis.

The board should delegate to the superintendent the function of specifying detailed arrangements for the operation of schools. The arrangements become the district's administrative regulations that govern the operation of the schools. If state law requires, the board should approve administrative regulations.

5. The development and review of policies will allow for the participation of affected groups or individuals as appropriate to the policy decision being contemplated. In the event of a developing situation, the board may take immediate action on a policy matter.

6. Board policies will be reviewed annually to ensure their relevance, currency, and alignment with district goals and priorities.

7. The board delegates to the superintendent the responsibility to implement board policies. ■

Tips for reaching out to your legislators

School board members should be prepared to serve as advocates for their schools.

As a volunteer board member *and* elected representative from your community, your voice carries a lot of weight with officials at the local, state, and federal levels.

The Texas Association of School Boards, in its publication *Practical Communication Tips*, has some excellent "Do" and "Don't" strategies for school board members as they contact their elected representatives.

Here are a few of each:

Do:

- **Know what you are talking about.** Explain the facts and understand the opposition's point of view.
- **Use a local angle.** Explain how a bill will positively or negatively

affect the local school district. This can be very persuasive.

- **Communicate often, be friendly.** Keep in touch with legislators year-round, not just when you want something. Invite your elected representative to attend school functions like board meetings, special events, and workshops.

Don't:

- **Distort facts.** Present your position thoughtfully and honestly. Find the information and get back to the legislator if you don't have an answer to a question.
- **Don't change your position.** If the legislator has publicly committed to a position you encouraged, don't change your mind about it later, unless the bill was significantly amended. If the bill has been modified, let your legislator know your position has changed and recommend that hers does too.

For information, www.tasb.org. ■