

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

July 2017 Vol. 31, No. 3

Editor: Jeff Stratton

Board planning prevents leadership problems

A board can have a great relationship with its superintendent and the district can function well, but there can still be something missing if the board doesn't use a comprehensive planning process.

Planning gives the board and staff a vision to move the district forward. Planning has added benefits too: It lets the board know what to expect, gives the superintendent direction, lets building administrators know what is required of them, and conveys a sense of purpose to the community.

Here are some things to keep in mind about strategic planning:

- **Planning increases trust.** Boards are far less likely to micromanage the superintendent if the board and administrator team are on the same page regarding the district's future plans. That will increase trust at the board and superintendent level and prevent a leadership void in the school community.

- **To plan successfully, give power to get power.** Shared planning, accountability, and transparency promote positive board-staff relations and trust. When there is trust, a board can concentrate its

efforts on productive roles like being engaged and focusing on initiatives related to student achievement, policy development, and community relations.

- **Planning requires regular communication.** Planning doesn't work as it should if the board approves goals and then is kept in the dark for a year. The board should hear planning progress updates at least quarterly from several sources, including the superintendent and middle managers in the district. Use a planned schedule of presentations to keep the board updated on planning progress.

- **Celebrate and recognize success.** Each school year should conclude with some type of recognition event where board and staff celebrate achievement of the board's goals for the district.

The board that takes a goals-oriented approach to leadership will reinforce the idea in the community that the district is accountable to the public. That is something your community will appreciate.

The full board will be in a better position as well, and will feel comfortable and confident that there is a plan and vision in place for the district's future. ■

Keep planning effort relevant

A board's planning effort should be useful to the district for an extended time period. Here are some questions to ensure your planning efforts work for the long-term:

- Is the plan likely to be relevant for at least five years?
- Does the plan focus on matters of strategic importance?

- Is the plan sufficiently separated from day-to-day operations?
- Is the plan realistic?
- Is there a built-in process to regularly review progress on the plan? ■

Respect the board and administrator

Golden Rule

Support of the superintendent is the responsibility of the board. Communication is the responsibility of the superintendent of schools.

Good relationships between the board and superintendent can break down when you neglect this rule. It helps board members to remember:

- Board members support their administrator by letting him know what they want — they provide direction.

- Board members also support the superintendent by ensuring that money is available for the school district to carry out its mission of educating children.

- Administrators, of course, carry out the board's policies and strategies — they are the board's manager.

For the board to know how things are going, the superintendent must provide feedback and recommend new actions. ■

Base superintendent's evaluation on principles

The board and superintendent team have a better chance for a positive administrator evaluation process if both parties have agreed to some ground rules. The following principles can give your board a sound base upon which to evaluate the superintendent:

- The evaluation criteria should be in writing, clearly stated, and mutually agreed upon by the board and the superintendent. The criteria should focus on the superintendent's job description and the school district's goals. The evaluation tool should be acceptable to both the superintendent and board.
- The formal evaluation process should be conducted annually at a mutually agreed-upon time.
- Each board member should evaluate the superintendent, and these individual evaluations should then be compiled into an overall evaluation by the entire board. The board president can organize this.

- The superintendent should conduct a self-evaluation prior to discussing the board's evaluation, and the board as a whole should discuss the superintendent's self-evaluation and its own evaluation of the administrator with the superintendent.

- The board can discuss its evaluation of the superintendent in closed session if requested by the superintendent and if the board determines its discussion in open session will needlessly and irreparably injure the superintendent's reputation. Board members should be encouraged to communicate their criticisms and concerns to the superintendent in closed session.

- The board president needs to develop a written summary of the individual evaluations, including both the strengths and the weaknesses of the superintendent, and place it in the superintendent's personnel file to be incorporated into the next cycle of evaluations. ■

Are you responsible for finances?

There are plenty of board members who, after their first meeting, fret that they don't have the time or expertise to understand every detail of their district's financial situation. Here's a board-service tip: No board member needs to know where every cent went. That's a lesson some board members learn the hard way. If the board scrutinizes every bill from \$2 to \$20,000, meetings will last until 2 a.m.

A board that spends all its time on bills neglects the big issues and challenges the district faces. Rather than being bookkeepers, spend board time on be-

ing policymakers and tackling the district's strategic business. You will be more productive that way.

Yes, the board is responsible for finance. But you can meet this responsibility most effectively by using a finance committee and delegating the management of finance to the superintendent.

Then, monitor results. Do this by paying special attention to changes: What's different this month compared to last month? Or last year? Ask questions of the superintendent if you don't understand something. ■