

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Increase student achievement with an 'aligned' district

In an education career that began with teaching second-graders and led to sitting in the superintendent's chair, Dr. Peter Gorman came to believe that school districts whose governance and management is aligned can deliver better student achievement.

What does this mean for a school district? As Gorman puts it: "Responsibility is much more powerful than accountability. Someone else imposes accountability on you, but responsibility comes from yourself internally."

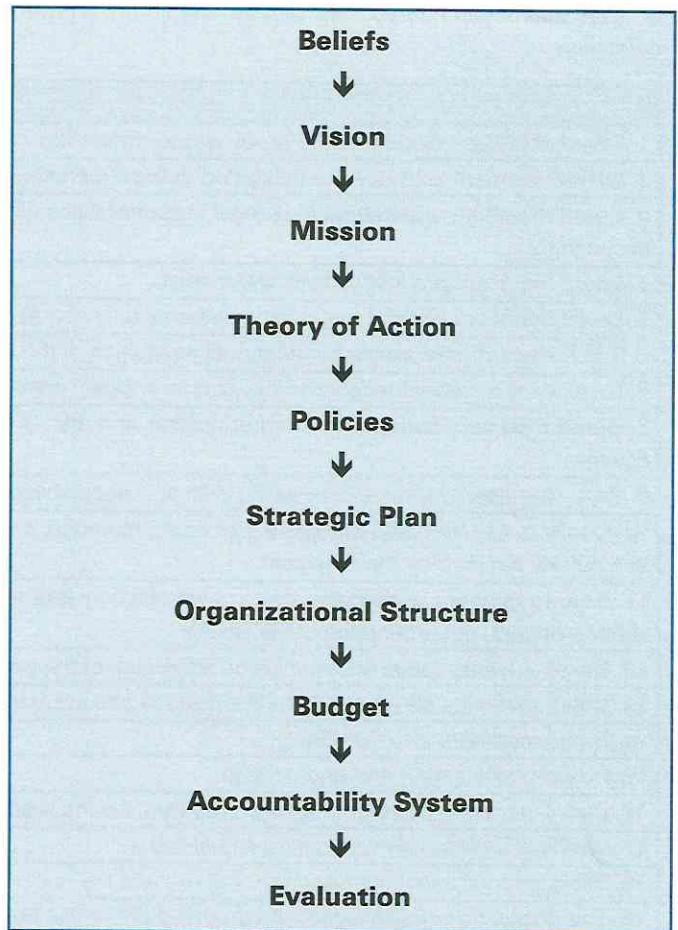
Here's more from Gorman:

In my experience and through my observations and research, I've noticed that the school districts that have done the best work increasing student achievement at scale were what I call aligned systems. These are school districts where a number of elements are working in an aligned way so that one element supports and compounds the other elements of the system. I use the word *compounds* like compound interest. For example, two elements added together don't only equal the value of the two elements but create an even greater number over time because working together, they make each other more effective and add up to even more.

As a superintendent, I worked to align the school district, creating a climate and culture that allowed us to put in place systems, processes, and structures that supported us working together as a team to increase student achievement, raising the bar for all students and closing achievement

gaps while increasing the number of students graduating college- and/or career-ready.

The graphic below shows the elements of an aligned school system. ■



Board member: Do we have enough money?

“Are we getting ourselves into financial trouble?”

This is a question most boards wrestle with at one time or another. And since not all board members are financial wizards, some members may feel they are on thin ice when it comes to asking questions about the district’s finances.

Here are three questions boards can ask their superintendent to find answers and ease their worries.

1. Do we have a financial “cushion”? Money in the bank not only provides a financial cushion, but also a mental cushion for board members. As a board member, I’d feel much better adding up liabilities for the next 30 days (utilities, payment on debt, payroll), subtracting that from money on hand, and knowing we had a financial cushion.

2. Are revenues and expenses in line with projections? Ask your superintendent for a variance report summary. This report will show board members how revenues and expenses have been meeting the board’s budgeted expectations.

With a glance at a variance report, board members can see where revenues stand in relation to budget projections, how expenses compare to budget, and where the district stands overall in net income in relation to budget.

3. How will we end the year? Consider asking for a projection about whether the district will finish with a year-end surplus or loss.

Tip: Consider a board work/study session during the year and ask your superintendent to make financial updates and education part of the agenda. ■

How effective and successful is your board? Let’s find out!

Key: Check “Yes” if the statement is true all the time. Check “Some” if the item is at least partially true. Check “No” if the item is never true. If you find yourself with too many “no” answers, speak with your superintendent about arranging some board education.

	Yes	Some	No
1. Board activities are confined to policy issues, rather than management issues.			
2. All management activities are delegated to the superintendent.			
3. Board members understand their legal responsibilities as trustees of the school district and act accordingly.			
4. Board members are lobbyists for the district.			
5. Board members attempt to exercise authority only at meetings.			
6. The full board participates in the annual evaluation of the superintendent.			
7. New board members receive an orientation to board service.			
8. Board members budget for board education and attend state and national opportunities when possible.			
9. Board members represent the whole district -- not just special interest groups.			
10. Conflicts among board members -- or board members and the superintendent -- are addressed and quickly handled by the president.			
11. Board members understand that communication with staff should be channeled through the superintendent, not around the administrator.			
12. Board activities focus on the mission statement of the school district.			
13. Board meetings stay focused on the agenda and are businesslike.			
14. Board members arrive on time.			
15. Board meeting start and end on time.			
16. Board members come to meetings prepared, having read the agenda and supporting materials.			
17. We deal successfully with controversial items.			
18. We don’t hold executive sessions that exclude the superintendent.			
19. The district has shown significant progress under this board’s leadership.			
20. Board members are satisfied with the overall operation of the board.			