

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Does your board's leadership affect student achievement?

When boards decide where to focus their time and district resources, nothing is more important to improving student achievement than district-level leadership.

The extent to which the superintendent works with his board to maintain board support for goals for student achievement and instruction means a great deal.

How should your board be spending their time to improve achievement? Here are some ideas:

1. Put district achievement and instructional goals at the top of the list of district priorities.
2. Adopt five-year, non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
3. Adopt varied and diverse instructional styles that allow for a wide range of learning styles.

Think of the board like an air traffic control

system when thinking about how the board and superintendent affect student achievement. The metaphor can help boards as they think about roles and responsibilities.

- Teachers fly the planes (deliver instruction).
- Principals lay out the flight plans (supervise delivery of instruction).
- The superintendent sits in the control tower monitoring the progress of flights (supervises school staff).
- The board is the FAA (monitors the results via review of student achievement data).

The first time the board spots an anomaly in achievement data, the board and superintendent need to respond. Ask:

1. What kind of assistance is needed and where?
2. Where do we need to place more or less pressure? ■

Weekly meeting with superintendent improves communication

When Sherri Whiting was president of the Crowley (Texas) ISD, she met with Superintendent Greg Gibson every Monday at 8:30 a.m. sharp. "We're in his office every Monday for about 90 minutes," she said.

The meeting has an agenda, Whiting said. This typically includes a list of questions that board

members have given the president. "We also discuss problems that are coming up," she said. "The Monday meetings give us a chance to do some thinking in advance about, 'Where should we go with this?'"

The superintendent also brings in other administrators to the session as needed, Whiting said. ■

Define how and where the board interacts with the superintendent

Does your board have a member or two who like to make the pie while the rest of the board is ready to get its fingers out of the pie-making and let the superintendent run the schools?

This happens more than you would think. Constituents want the location of a bus stop changed or a teacher removed.

One method a board can use to “get its fingers out of the pie-making” is writing policies that

define how and where the board interacts with the superintendent. Here are some examples:

The policies on board and superintendent interaction include:

- Governance or Management Connection.
- Accountability of the Superintendent.
- Delegation to the Superintendent.
- Delegation of Authority Resolution.
- Monitoring Executive Performance. ■

Board question: What does the vice president do?

Question for The Board Doctor: “The title ‘vice president’ sounds impressive, but what does the position really do?” asks a board member. “Is it just a title with little or no authority?”

Answer: The board vice president’s job is what the board makes of it. Traditionally, the vice president serves as the president’s backup in the event of illness or departure from the board, or when the president must miss a meeting. The vice president also serves useful functions like chairing an important committee, for example, leading the committee in charge of the board’s professional development and/or governance efforts.

Ask your vice president to work closely with the president to stay current on board issues and operations so that she can assume the president’s duties in the future if selected for the position. She might participate with the president and superintendent in developing the board’s meeting agendas, for example.

Tip: The vice president’s job should never be purely ceremonial. The board should value a

strong vice president. By encouraging a capable vice president, the board guarantees continuity for itself if something befalls the president. Below, find a basic job description for the board vice president position. Tailor it to fit your board’s needs.

Vice President of the Board

Position Description: To maintain leadership continuity by performing the duties of the board president in the president’s absence.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Attend all board meetings.
- Be prepared to perform the president’s duties when called upon to do so.
- Chair a committee.
- Work as consultant and advisor to the board president.
- Develop rapport and close working relationship with the president and the superintendent.
- Carry out special assignments as directed. ■

Superintendent hiring decision affects students

Job one for any school board is to hire and evaluate a superintendent. That critical hiring is a key board responsibility that cannot be delegated.

The decision to hire a superintendent is crucial because the superintendent’s leadership affects student achievement.

It’s important that the board gets it right when

it hires the superintendent. What takes place in the district’s classrooms is so important that it presents an argument against hiring a nontraditional superintendent candidate for the top job. If you are serious about student achievement, find someone who understands instruction, the nuts and bolts of teaching, and not just theory. ■