

Board & Administrator

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Vision a characteristic of successful districts

In “Eight characteristics of effective school boards: At a glance,” the Center for Public Education stresses the need for a board to have a vision for the school district:

“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.”

What is your board’s vision for the district’s future?

Discuss this as a board team.

Board’s vision discussion points:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

For information, <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards#st-hash.YNIp50ko.dpuf>. ■

Focus on goals can prevent micromanagement

Question for The Board Doctor: “Our board has a very difficult time letting go of the decisions being made about academic programs,” said a New Jersey board member. “What can we do to fully turn these over to our superintendent?”

Answer: One of the great qualities board members bring to board service is a passion for education, and the desire to see that students receive wonderful academic opportunities. It’s really a jolt of positive energy to the board that needs to be properly channeled.

As a board, concentrate on setting clear academic goals for the superintendent and then monitor the administrator’s performance on your goals for her.

Think of your board as a corporation. The board sets the strategic performance goals for the corporation — the high-level thinking. The superintendent, as the board’s CEO, is responsible for the day-to-day performance of the corporation in meeting the board’s strategic goals. The staff, hired by the superintendent, is responsible for producing the product. In this case, delivering instruction. ■

Dealing with board member ‘grudges’

When a board member has a grudge against a staff member, the board — led by its president — should be prepared to act so that the board member’s single focus doesn’t become disruptive to board teamwork. A grudge is just another way of saying “single-issue board member.”

Here are two ideas for managing this board problem:

1. Understand the board member’s special interest and, if possible, seek to put it to use. Sometimes, a single-issue agenda can actually be in the school district’s best interest. However, firing a teacher, principal, or coach is not a positive single-issue.

The president and superintendent should

hear out the board member and determine whether the board member’s interest is a positive for the district. If so, ask her to develop the idea and inform the board.

This can work out well, because raising the board’s awareness on an issue is often healthy.

2. Act swiftly if the single agenda is a negative one. When a board member’s agenda has the potential to damage the board and district, you need to discuss the issue in the open. Tactfully, you have to say, “What will you do if and after you get your way on this issue? If you can’t settle this matter, in the interests of the district, you need to consider why you sought a board seat in the first place.” ■

Make that mission matter

In its *Board Officers Handbook*, the Iowa Association of School Boards suggests that boards start each meeting by having a board member read the district’s mission statement aloud.

IASB suggests that after this reading, the board member should then identify some agenda items that give good examples of the board and district’s concentration on the mission.

For information, www.iasb.org.

Here are two other tips for a school board to emphasize by focusing on its mission statement:

1. Print the mission on the meeting agenda. Over time, it will become a tacit reminder to the board when it is making decisions. The board can also arrange to have the mission statement prominently displayed in the meeting room.

2. Review the mission statement on a regular basis. Ask that the superintendent build in mission statement and vision review on the board’s annual calendar. It’s an activity that the board doesn’t need to perform every year, but should be done every three to four years as factors affecting the schools change. ■

Is that committee truly necessary?

One smart strategy for the board is to make an annual review of each committee to ensure that all are still of use to the board and district. The president, along with the superintendent, should do this every year.

Committees that have outlived their usefulness are a drag on the board’s resources and time.

The president can begin by reviewing each committee’s purpose and range of activities. This will help the president determine whether the committee is still viable or simply a “paper” committee.

If a committee is no longer necessary, recommend that the board eliminate it. ■