



Indicator: The school board and superintendent present a unified vision for school improvement. (5621)

Explanation: Every superintendent certainly desires a relationship with the school board that enables everyone to be heading in the same direction. When tough decisions are necessary, and they always are, this is especially important. The schools, parents, community leaders, and taxpayers want to know where the district is headed. Merely writing a vision statement doesn't do the job. Arriving at an understanding between the superintendent and board members as to how the vision is to be communicated is a necessary step.

Questions: Does your district have a clear vision of what it wants to accomplish for all its students and how it intends to continuously improve its ability to deliver on what it promises? How do the superintendent and school board members arrive at this vision? When is the vision reviewed and revised, if necessary? What kind of understanding does the superintendent and board have about communicating the vision? How is the vision communicated?

Agreement between the board and superintendent in regard to philosophy and goals provides critical support for district improvement efforts. However, the superintendent and school board in a district facing a crisis in student achievement and public confidence should spend whatever time is needed to talk through issues in an effort to ensure the improvement initiative will be presented – and supported on an ongoing basis – with a united front. Here are a few points to keep in mind:

School boards must play an active role, continuously and publicly providing support for the reform initiative through several key actions. First, the school board should engage in intensive and ongoing efforts to communicate and sell the vision for reform to the community. They should talk with community members about the plan, gather perspectives and ideas, and use these – in collaboration with the superintendent and other district leaders – to refine the plan.

On an ongoing basis, the school board should act as a monitor to ensure student learning remains the top priority for attention and resources. The question should be asked repeatedly: How will doing this – or not doing it – affect student achievement?

The school board should use its policy role to develop policies that support improvement efforts. Boards should also engage in periodic self-evaluation, asking whether they are solidly focused on this policy role, not diverted by administrative matters. However, they should still be knowledgeable about district programs and of the ways in which these contribute to overall improvement efforts. School board time and assistance from district staff will be needed to ensure board members have the opportunity to learn about programs and initiatives.

District leaders should work to engage the community – parents, business leaders, civic groups, and churches – in improvement efforts, perhaps using data about poor student performance to demonstrate the need to change and

so galvanize broad-based support for district initiatives. Alternately, if players outside the district structure are taking action to jumpstart reform efforts, district leaders should work with them to identify areas of concern as well as ways all parties can work together to improve student achievement. (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2007)

References and Resources

Cawelti, G., & Protheroe, N. (2007). The school board and central office in district improvement. In H. J. Walberg (Ed.), *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement* (pp. 37–52). Lincoln, IL: Academic Development Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.adi.org/about/downloads/Restructuring%20Handbook.pdf>

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