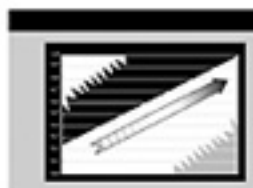




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TASB Board Effectiveness Audit

Introduction and Audit Document



Board Effectiveness Audit

Introduction

Every school board wants first and foremost to ensure that students in the district succeed at the highest levels possible. Every decision the board makes and all the resources it marshals for the district are ultimately intended to promote this end.

To be successful over the long haul in promoting increased student achievement, the board must govern with vision, knowledge, and consistency.

Effective boards are marked by certain characteristics:

1. *They have embraced a vision and a set of clearly defined priorities for the district that structure both the board's decision making and the work of the district staff.* Vision and goals ensure both the district and the board have a clear focus for their efforts.
2. *They have a clear picture of what their work entails.* That is, they understand their job relative to the work of others and know the tools at their disposal for performing the job.
3. *They have formalized their work.* That is, they have developed and follow clearly defined procedures and schedules for doing their work.
4. *They foster, through their own practices, the free flow of information within the community.* The free flow of information ensures the community is informed about and involved in the district's work.

All boards embody these characteristics in some measure. By law, boards must adopt student performance objectives related to the Academic Excellence Indicator System—objectives that, in the absence of a more complete set of priorities, can provide a focus for board and administrative activities. By law, boards must perform certain tasks enumerated in the Texas Education Code—tasks that give a basic definition to the board's job. And by law, certain board tasks, such as adopting the budget, must be preceded by public hearings and must occur by specific dates—requirements that ensure basic district obligations are fulfilled in a timely manner and with the input of the entire community.

Truly effective boards—those that have positioned themselves to contribute consistently to increased student achievement—do much more to cultivate these characteristics.

The TASB Board Effectiveness Audit assesses how well the board has laid the groundwork to govern for sustained improvement.

Nature of the Audit

The audit examines how fully the board currently embraces these characteristics of effectiveness. It lists practices in three areas that are the foundations for embodying the characteristics. If the board ignores the practices listed here or performs them only perfunctorily, its capacity for leadership and the district's capacity for sustained improvement are left to chance and haphazard action. If it embraces them fully, the board will be positioned to make a consistent and sustained contribution to increased student achievement.

The audit is intended in large measure as a **planning** tool for boards that want to move to a higher level of effectiveness. **Very few boards are expected to be able to check off all the items on the audit in their initial review.** In fact, many boards will be able to check off only a handful. Inability to check off many items on the list does not mean the board is doing a poor job. It means only that the board may not be in a position to sustain its success over the long run.

The audit is quite limited in scope. It is divided into three parts. The first two focus on the board's most basic responsibility—the duty to govern and oversee the management of the district. The third focuses on the board's internal operations. All three address practices related to promoting good communication.

Planning and Governance. The board performs many different tasks in governing the district—from adopting policy, to approving a budget, to hiring and evaluating a superintendent. The audit focuses exclusively on one aspect of the board's governing responsibility—the establishment and dissemination of a vision and goals for the district. The audit concentrates on these tasks because they provide a framework for all other governing tasks the board performs. If these tasks are not fully defined, systematically fulfilled, and carefully communicated, the board's and the district's effectiveness are compromised. TASB's work with boards in recent years suggests that many boards could benefit from a more fully defined and formalized conception of the vision and goal-setting task.

Oversight of Management. Oversight of management is a critical board function. However, TASB's work with boards suggests that few boards have developed either a clear picture of what this function entails or clearly defined procedures for carrying it out. The audit offers a picture of this function and a short enumeration of effective practices in overseeing management. This is the area of the audit likely to require the most work by boards and superintendents before they will be able to check off the items.

Board-Superintendent Team Operations. The third section of the audit focuses not on a board duty but on basic board operations. The items in this section address

how fully the board has formalized its work procedures and the process of reviewing its own effectiveness. TASB has found that the more fully the board has formalized and documented certain procedures and the more systematically the board reviews these procedures, the more efficiently the board works.

In each section, the audit covers certain basic practices that, if performed well and in a committed fashion, provide a solid foundation from which the board performs the rest of its work. It asks whether the board has institutionalized certain specific practices—that is, whether the board has built them into the basic routine of its work.

The audit should not be used as a basis for criticizing current or former board or superintendent actions. To do so is to violate the future-oriented spirit of the audit. It's quite possible for a board-superintendent team to have performed admirably for a district and done none of the items listed here. However, the capacity of the team to sustain high performance over time without the framework mentioned here is limited. The purpose of the audit is to provide a baseline from which the board can move forward, not look back.

Suggested Procedure for Using the Audit

The audit is designed so that the board-superintendent team working alone or with key administrators can use it. An outside facilitator is not necessary. However, the team may use an outside facilitator if its members think that will assist in the discussion. The procedure outlined below can expedite the team's filling out and discussing the audit if they choose to work without an outside facilitator.

People Involved: The entire board and superintendent working as a team should complete the audit.

Time Required: It will generally take two to four hours for the board and superintendent team to fill out the audit, discuss the results, and make initial plans for further action.

Session Type: A meeting of the board and superintendent to complete the audit and discuss findings must be posted in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act. The discussion should be conducted as an open meeting. If it becomes necessary to discuss the job duties or actual performance of individual members of the board-superintendent team, that portion of the discussion may be conducted as a closed meeting.

Training Credit: A meeting of the board and superintendent to work through the findings may be counted toward the board's annual team-building obligation, under 19 TAC §61.1(b)(2). To count the session for team-building credit, all board members

and the superintendent must be present for the entire session; the session must be at least three hours in length; and the session must conclude with an assessment of additional training needs, based on the audit findings and a review of the Framework for School Board Development.

If the board chooses to count the session as fulfilling its team-building requirement, the local district, not TASB, is the provider of continuing education credit.

Materials Needed: At least a week before the session, each team member should be given a copy of the audit and supporting document. At the meeting, the team should have a copy of board agendas and minutes from meetings of the preceding 12 months; any existing board operating documents, including operating procedures manuals and calendars; a copy of the district goals; and the board policy manual.

Steps for Completing the Audit:

1. Allow all board members and the superintendent to fill out the audit and review the support document in advance of the session. **It is imperative that team members read the support document as they fill out the form.** It is not necessary at this stage that individual board members consult district documents to verify that they can legitimately check off an item.
2. At the meeting, begin by determining which items the entire team believes they may check off, verifying responses against district documents as necessary. Because the audit focuses not on the quality of the tasks but simply on whether the board has performed them, decisions on whether the board can check off an item should be by unanimous agreement.
3. If there are items that some, but not others, believe can be checked off, allow those who checked off the item to provide justification for doing so. Following the justifications, determine if there is unanimous agreement that the item can be checked. Lack of unanimous agreement means the board cannot check off an item.
4. For each unchecked item, discuss and decide the following:
 - Whether the board considers the item important
 - What steps would be involved for the board and superintendent to be able to check off the item in the future
 - What are the first steps that need to be taken, who will be responsible for them, and when will they be completed

Decisions on the issues in this last bullet should be written down.

The following information may be useful in deciding on time frames and priorities:

- In general, items numbered "X.1" (for example, 2.1, 5.1, or 7.1) are the most critical ones in the audit. They are also the items that require the most care and planning before they can be fully addressed.
- In general, the lower the number of an item, the more direct its impact on improving student performance.

Assistance: If the board has questions about completing the audit, it should check the "Frequently Asked Questions" about the audit on the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org or call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

TASB Leadership Team Services also has facilitation services available to assist with discussion of the audit.

Board Effectiveness Audit

Planning and Governance

1. A vision statement is in place for the district.

- 1.1 The vision statement meets the criteria for a well-developed vision statement listed in the supporting materials.
- 1.2 The board reviews and readopts the vision statement at least every five years through formal board action.
- 1.3 The procedure for periodically reviewing the district vision statement is written. The board understands the procedure and supports it.
- 1.4 Mechanisms for disseminating the vision are clearly identified and written down.

2. A comprehensive statement of goals for the district is in place.

- 2.1 The board adopts or reaffirms a comprehensive list of district goals each year through formal board action.
- 2.2 Mechanisms for disseminating the goals for the district are clearly identified and written down.
- 2.3 The procedure for developing and reviewing district goals is written. The board understands the process and supports it.
- 2.4 The board is familiar with the administration's written plans for accomplishing the goals. The plans include time lines for implementation, specific mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of the plans, and specific times for reporting to the board on progress.

3. Board actions reinforce the central importance of the goals to the work of the district.

- 3.1 Deliberation on major items before the board routinely includes a discussion of the recommended action's impact on meeting district goals.
- 3.2 The board's superintendent evaluation instrument and process focus first and foremost on the superintendent's success in addressing the board-adopted goals.
- 3.3 The board's budget review process specifically identifies how goals are funded in the proposed budget, whether funding is adequate, and whether funding priorities are consistent with board-adopted goals.

4. The board monitors plan implementation and district success in a formal, scheduled manner.

- 4.1 Time lines in the plans for reporting to the board are incorporated into the board's annual activity calendar and included on appropriate monthly agendas.
- 4.2 The board reviews the appropriateness, adequacy, and usefulness of the reports annually with the superintendent.

Oversight of Management

- 5. Goals, standards, and/or benchmarks have been established for major aspects of district operations.**
- 5.1 The board receives information annually from the superintendent on the goals, standards, or benchmarks the administration uses to assess effectiveness for the major areas of district operations.
 - 5.2 The board receives regular, scheduled updates on operations effectiveness as measured against standards or benchmarks.
- 6. The Board is familiar with the broad outlines of the systems the superintendent has put in place to manage district operations.**
- 6.1 The board and superintendent have a schedule for periodic updates on major management systems in the district, including presentations on how benchmark data is used to plan improvements.
 - 6.2 The board's evaluation of the superintendent's performance in district operations areas focuses on the superintendent's success in establishing appropriate measures and standards for performance; putting effective plans, programs, procedures, or systems in place; monitoring success; and using data for improvement.

Board-Superintendent Team Operations

- 7. The board and superintendent team regularly checks expectations and assesses board-superintendent operations.**
- 7.1 The board and superintendent participate in an annual team-building activity focused on a self-assessment.
 - 7.2 The team-building activity concludes with written plans or priorities for continuing education by the board and by individual trustees for the year.
 - 7.3 The effectiveness of the team-building activity and the success of board members in meeting their continuing education plans are reviewed as a formal agenda item six to 10 months after the activity.
 - 7.4 The board has adopted and annually reaffirms an ethics statement or code of conduct for board members.
- 8. Written operating procedures for the board and superintendent are in place.**
- 8.1 A written annual calendar of board events, outlining major board activities by month, is in place.
 - 8.2 Operating procedures are codified in a written board-superintendent procedures document; new board members are oriented to operating procedures within the first 60 days of service.
 - 8.3 An annual review of operating procedures is included on the board activity calendar.

TASB Board Effectiveness Audit

Support Document



Support Document for the TASB Board Effectiveness Audit

This document should be used in conjunction with the TASB Board Effectiveness Audit. It provides a brief overview of the importance of each of the three sections of the audit and more detailed information on each item in the audit. It should be consulted by individual board-superintendent team members and by the team as a whole as they fill out the audit and plan for improvement.

For each item on the audit, the support document provides the following:

- A brief explanation of the importance of the practice queried by the item
- Objective criteria to be used in deciding whether the board-superintendent team may check off the item
- A brief list of resources the team can use for help in improving its practices

There is no best way to do many of the practices listed in the audit. As the explanations in this document point out, they can be done effectively in a number of different ways. The important thing is that the board-superintendent team does them as a matter of planned routine, not as an afterthought. If the team structures its work around these practices, it will help itself and the district as a whole focus on continuous improvement in the areas of greatest importance.

For items on which the board-superintendent team would like additional help, it should be sure to check the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org, under Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit. TASB will post updated resources and additional samples for the various audit items on the Web on an ongoing basis.

Planning and Governance

By statute, the board has exclusive authority to govern the district.

Boards govern through a variety of means—most commonly by adopting policies that function as law in the district, by adopting the budget that allots specific monies to specific district activities, and by hiring a superintendent to serve as the district’s chief administrative officer.

The most important governing function the board can perform, however, is ensuring there is a fully articulated vision statement in place for the district and ensuring that annual and multiyear goals have been developed to achieve the vision. The vision and goals should then govern, in part, the policy, budget, and administrative decisions that are made.

Organizational development specialists almost uniformly agree that the presence of a clearly articulated vision for the organization and the existence of well-defined goals are crucial for the organization’s long-term health and are necessary if the organization intends to move to a higher level of accomplishment.

A vision and goals provide a clear picture of the result the district is aiming for as a consequence of its work. This picture helps coordinate and shape the day-to-day decisions that those who work in the organization must make. In the absence of a vision and goals, decisions are made haphazardly and driven by the pressures of the moment rather than by a coherent and coordinated view of the future.

The simple presence of a vision statement and a set of goals does not guarantee that the district will operate in a coordinated and concerted fashion. For a vision and goals to function effectively, those at the top of the organization—the board and superintendent—must use the vision and goals to structure their work and guide their own decision making, and they must be seen to use them. Only when the vision and goals are visibly and consistently reinforced can they truly be said to be in place.

This section of the audit focuses on the mechanisms by which the board establishes a vision and goals in the district, ensures that they are current, and incorporates them into its own decision making and month-to-month work.

1. A Vision Statement Is in Place for the District

1.1 The vision statement meets the criteria for a well-developed vision statement listed in the supporting materials.

A vision statement is a picture of the future for the district we want to create. It should be realistic, but at the same time it should represent a high ideal. It should address what we want the children and/or the graduates of the district to be like, what we want the learning environment to be like (in the classroom, on the campus, and in the home), and what we want the supporting environment to be like (the community at large, in its relationship to our developing children).

The drafting of the vision statement can involve any number of key persons. It can be drafted by the board and superintendent alone; by the administration for review by the board; by a group consisting of all or some of the board, the superintendent and key administrators, a sampling of teachers and district staff, and a sampling of community members; or by any combination of these people.

For the vision statement to be effective, two things must be true: the vision must have the clear support of the board and superintendent, and it must include input from staff and community. If the vision does not have the clear support of the board and superintendent, they will ignore it in making future decisions, and it will come to be regarded as nothing more than window dressing, with decisions continuing to be made haphazardly. If it does not include some type of input from staff or community, they will have no positive incentive to be guided by it or to work for its accomplishment.

To be effective, then, the vision must be **shared**.

Vision statements can take many forms. Often, they are written as if ideal conditions already exist. This mode of expressing the vision reinforces the sense that we are already on our way to realizing the vision. The vision statement can be a narrative or a listing of the characteristics and qualities we desire for the district and its children. Many districts find the latter easier to develop. Normally, vision statements are descriptive in nature rather than prescriptive because descriptive statements open up thinking about innovative ways to achieve the vision, whereas prescriptive ones tend to shut such thinking down.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if all of the following are true:

- Your vision statement is written.
- It lists or describes desired qualities for each of the following: students of the district, the learning environment, and the supporting environment.
- It was developed with some formal mechanism for eliciting and actively considering input from staff and community – through direct participation of members of these groups in the drafting of the vision (the preferred method) or through solicitation of written suggestions and discussion of suggestions during the drafting process.
- All current members of the board and the superintendent have agreed, in a formal adoption or readoption by the board, to be guided by the vision.

Where can we get help?

Several organizations provide facilitation services to assist in developing a shared vision. These organizations include TASB Leadership Team Services and the 20 regional education service centers (ESCs).

For general information on planning, check *Moving toward High Performance: A Guide to District Planning for School Boards*. Texas Association of School Boards. © 2000

For sample vision statements, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

TASB periodically offers sessions on developing a shared vision at its regional and statewide training events.

1. A Vision Statement Is in Place for the District

1.2 The board reviews and readopts the vision statement at least every five years through formal board action.

A vision statement should be developed with the intent that it will be in effect for a number of years. Otherwise, the district will find itself reversing long-term decisions made under a previous vision to accommodate the ideals of a new vision. The result can be chaos, inefficiency, and loss of commitment to any vision statement. The need for a vision to remain in place for a number of years is another reason the vision statement should be developed with the participation of as broad an array of interested parties as possible.

Although the vision statement functions best if left substantially the same for a period of years, the board should nevertheless make sure the vision statement is reviewed periodically. If adjustments are needed, minor or otherwise, they can be made. Periodic review ensures that the vision continues to have force in the district in guiding decision making and structuring initiatives. No vision statement should remain in place without a review at least every five years.

The board may be directly involved in this review or may delegate it to the superintendent or a special committee. Any procedure can be effective as long as the board is comfortable with it and believes the procedure will produce recommendations the board is willing to accept. If the board is not likely to accept the results of the review or if the recommendations are not likely to result in a continuing vision statement shared by the larger district community, then the board should use another review procedure.

A formal, annual review of the vision statement is neither necessary nor advisable. However, the board may wish to reaffirm the vision statement each year, as a signal to the staff and community that the board is still committed to the vision and continues to be guided by it.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- The board has formally adopted or readopted its vision statement within the last five years.
- The board's annual calendar of activities or another written document clearly specifies when the vision statement will next be considered for review.

Where can we get help?

If you have questions about the review and readoption of a vision statement, or if you wish facilitation services for the review process, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

1. A Vision Statement Is in Place for the District

- 1.3 The procedure for periodically reviewing the district vision statement is written. The board understands the procedure and supports it.

The mechanism for reviewing the vision within the five-year period should be documented in an appropriate place to make sure the task is not overlooked and to ensure the review process meets the board's needs.

The documentation should outline at least the following information:

1. Frequency of the review
2. Basic composition of the reviewing team (number of people and the positions involved)
3. Basic charge to the reviewing team (e.g., "Determine if the vision statement still represents a shared picture of the basic ideal for the district.")

This documentation might appear as part of an overall outline of the district's planning process; it might appear as part of a "Next Steps" listing in an existing planning document, like the district improvement plan; or it might be incorporated into a local policy on planning. There are any number of appropriate places into which this information might be incorporated. What is most important is that the information be written down and that the board knows where to find it.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- The vision statement has been adopted or formally reviewed within the last five years.
- The board can point to written documentation of the review process that addresses at least the three areas above.

Where can we get help?

If the board has questions about the review process that cannot be answered locally, you may call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

1. A Vision Statement Is in Place for the District

1.4 Mechanisms for disseminating the vision are clearly identified and written down.

A well-developed vision statement represents the shared ideal of the larger community (board, staff, parents, students, businesses). It is the ultimate goal that drives long-term decision making and priority setting for the district.

As such, the vision statement must be highly visible among those who work for its realization. A vision statement that is not familiar to those who work in the district and those who support the district is not shared and will not be effective in guiding the district's work.

Vision statements vary in length and form, and the practical mechanisms for disseminating the vision statement within the district will vary accordingly. At a minimum, the vision statement should be visibly posted in the boardroom and in all district buildings. Other modes of dissemination—through newsletters, in documents, etc.—will depend upon local conditions.

The board should make sure there are clearly identified ways to make the district community familiar with the vision statement and to keep the vision statement visible in the community. The board need not determine these mechanisms; that task is better left to the district administration. The board should make sure the administration has identified in writing ways to make the vision statement available and that the administration has followed up on its plan. The written identification of ways to disseminate the vision statement can be as formal as an administrative regulation or as informal as an administrative memo to principals or administrative staff. It might be included in a larger planning document for the district or as part of a district communications program. Any of these (and there are other possible options) is fine. The bottom line is that the administration should have written guidelines or a written plan for publicizing the vision statement, and written materials should be available to the board on request.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- The vision statement is clearly posted in the board meeting room or copies are available at each meeting.
- The board has seen the administration's written guidelines or plan for disseminating the vision in the district and is comfortable with the substance of the guidelines or plan.

Where can we get help?

If you have questions about the dissemination of a vision statement in the district that cannot be answered locally, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

2. A Comprehensive Statement of Goals for the District Is in Place

2.1 The board adopts or reaffirms a comprehensive list of district goals each year through formal board action.

A vision statement pictures the ideal we seek for our students, for their learning environment, and for the community that supports them. It is a broad-brush picture that we hope to see realized at some point in the future.

Goals are more specific short- and long-term results we want to see achieved as part of the effort to realize the vision.

For a board to govern effectively and efficiently, it must not only adopt a vision statement to guide the district in the years to come, but it also must adopt a list of goals in support of that vision. This list should represent the short- and long-term priorities for the district from the board's point of view—the issues and desired results the board expects both itself and the district staff to focus on in the immediate future. The board uses these goals to guide its decision making. For example, it assesses recommendations that come before it in terms of their effect on the district's achieving its goals, and it uses the goals in assessing the budget the superintendent prepares and in establishing priorities for evaluating the superintendent's job performance. The administration uses the goals to set work priorities and expectations for district staff.

By law, the board must adopt student performance objectives related to the measures in the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) each year. These objectives address specific and important student achievement measures, but they are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of the priorities for the district from the board's perspective. The board also may wish to see (1) specific improvement in areas of student achievement not measured by the AEIS, (2) new or improved accomplishments in certain student services areas, (3) improved success in community outreach or involvement, or (4) improved efficiency or results in certain areas of district operations.

A comprehensive list of district goals addresses any such issues the board believes the district should concentrate on in the coming year and in the long term. The list should be comprehensive, but it should not be overwhelming. An absolutely critical component of good board governance is the willingness to set clear priorities among the many legitimate interests that merit a district's attention. In setting goals, the board needs to make sure it looks comprehensively at district needs but chooses among needs judiciously and realistically. A list of three to eight major district goals, in conjunction with performance objectives related to the AEIS, is fairly standard.

For each goal on the list, there should be specific criteria that will be used to determine whether and when the goal has been achieved. These criteria are sometimes implicit in the goal statements themselves, as goal statements outline the results we would like to see achieved. The criteria also can be supplementary to the goal statements, particularly if the goals are long-term and have intermediate checkpoints. Goals not accompanied by clear criteria for assessing success can lead to confusion among those charged with achieving them.

The list of district goals may be developed in several different ways. In some districts, standard practice calls for the board, superintendent, and possibly key administrators to work together to develop and choose goals. In others, the goals are developed by the administration for consideration and adoption by the board. In yet others, a broader spectrum of district staff and/or parents and community members may be involved.

Any of these methods can be effective as long as the board is **fully committed** to the goals it finally adopts. Failure to use the goals in the ways outlined above means the board does not embrace its stated goals as its priority. If this is the case, the board needs to reconsider the process by which goals are developed.

The goals the board adopts must be written and should be concisely stated for easy reference. The written document can take many forms: it can be a stand-alone list; it can be incorporated into the district improvement plan, which includes the detailed objectives related to the AEIS; or it can be incorporated into the district budget as a set of guiding principles. In districts that practice strategic planning, the list of goals may be incorporated into the strategic planning document or into annual update documents to the strategic plan. Any of these written forms will be helpful.

The board should take action on goals each year. Although the goals may remain the same for several years, the board should review, revise if necessary, and readopt goals annually. This action is necessary to ensure the district's stated goals still represent the priorities and commitments of the local board and are explicitly affirmed as such.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if all of the following are true:

- The board formally adopted or reaffirmed a list of goals within the past 12 months.
- Agenda materials, workshop documents, or minutes from the adoption process indicate the board considered a broad range of district issues and a comprehensive range of student-achievement issues before accepting the goals included in its list.
- Each member of the board can state in general terms the substantive content of current goals.
- The board can point to specific, written criteria that will be used to assess whether the district is succeeding in reaching its goals.

Where can we get help?

Several organizations provide facilitation services to assist in developing district goals. These organizations include TASB Leadership Team Services and the 20 regional ESCs.

For general information on planning and goal setting, check *Moving toward High Performance: A Guide to District Planning for School Boards*. Texas Association of School Boards. © 2000

For sample goal statements, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

TASB periodically offers sessions on the process of setting district goals at its regional and statewide training events.

2. A Comprehensive Statement of Goals for the District Is in Place

2.2 Mechanisms for disseminating the goals for the district are clearly identified and written down.

Like a vision statement, goals are only effective if they are known by those who are to be governed by them and if they are visible within the district community. As with the vision statement, the board should make sure there are clearly identified ways to make the district community familiar with the goals and to keep the goals visible in the community, but the board need not determine these mechanisms (this task should be handled by the administration). The administration should have some kind of written guideline or plan for distribution of district goals, which should be available to the board on request.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if all of the following are true:

- Current goals are either posted in the boardroom or made available to the audience at board meetings.
- All board members have a copy of the district goals at the board table for all meetings.
- The board has seen the administration's guideline or plan for disseminating district goals and is comfortable with it.

Where can we get help?

If you have questions about the dissemination of district goals that cannot be answered locally, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

2. A Comprehensive Statement of Goals for the District Is in Place

2.3 The procedure for developing and reviewing district goals is written. The board understands the procedure and supports it.

Once district goals have been developed and adopted, they should be reviewed and readopted each year. An annual review and readoption is crucial if the goals are to serve their purpose of focusing the attention of the board and staff and guiding their decision making.

Goals need not be changed each year, and most probably will not be. But each year they should be assessed to determine if they still represent the issues the board is willing to accept as priorities for district attention.

Planning processes in local school districts vary widely, and the mechanisms for developing and reviewing district goals can vary as well. In some cases, the board is directly involved in the development and review; in others, the administration or a broader group of district representatives carries out the task, and their recommendations are presented to the board for consideration. Any process is acceptable as long as the board is committed to the goals it finally adopts.

The basic procedure for developing and annually reviewing goals should be documented in an appropriate place to ensure the task is not overlooked and to ensure the board is comfortable with the process.

The documentation should include at least the following information:

1. When, during the year, the review will be performed
2. The composition of the reviewing team
3. The basic charge to the team if it is to consist of members other than simply the board, superintendent, and members of the administration. (This charge should state the scope of the team's authority, to avoid any confusion about the status of its work product.)

As with documentation of the mechanism for reviewing the vision statement, this documentation might (1) exist as part of an overall outline of the planning process in the district; (2) appear as part of a "Next Steps" listing in an existing planning document, like the district improvement plan; or (3) be incorporated into a local policy on planning. There are any number of appropriate places into which this information might be incorporated. The bottom line is that the information must be written down and easily accessible to the board and others.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if all of the following are true:

- The board has adopted or readopted a comprehensive list of district goals within the last 12 months.
- The board can point to written documentation that is easily accessible and that outlines at least the three areas listed above.
- The board did not reject or substantially revise the recommendations of a designated review team during the most recent goal adoption. (If the board rejected or substantially revised the team's recommendations, the review process may not be working properly.)

Where can we get help?

If the board has questions about the annual review process that cannot be answered locally, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

2. A Comprehensive Statement of Goals for the District Is in Place

- 2.4 The board is familiar with the administration's written plans for accomplishing the goals. The plans include time lines for implementation, specific mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of the plans, and specific times for reporting to the board on progress.

One of the board's fundamental responsibilities as a governing body is to set goals and direction for the district. Even if the board delegates the development of goals to the superintendent or a planning group, the board is responsible for the direction the goals establish and, by adopting them, accepts them as the board's priorities.

Once the goals are set, the superintendent is responsible for developing and implementing plans to accomplish them.

Goals are nothing more than inspirational slogans if concrete, written plans do not exist to accomplish them. To ensure specific work is under way to accomplish the goals, the board should be familiar with the administration's written plans. The plans can take many forms, but, whatever the form, they should include a statement of the result the board will see at the end of implementation, time lines for implementation, procedures for monitoring whether the plans are working, and a schedule for progress reports to the board. Although the board does not approve the administration's plans, trustees should discuss the plans with the superintendent if they believe the plans are not adequate or appropriate to accomplish the goal.

Failure to be familiar with the administration's plans limits the board's ability to represent the administration's efforts effectively to the public, can lead to misunderstanding and conflict when progress is reported, and will result in wasted effort if the plans turn out to be incompatible with the board's desired result.

Familiarity with the plans can take many forms: the superintendent may brief the board on the plans; trustees may be given copies of the plans; or the plans may be incorporated into a larger planning document, like the district improvement plan. The bottom line is that written plans should exist. They should be available to the board, and the board should be comfortable that the plans, if carried out successfully, will offer the district a reasonable prospect of achieving its goals.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if all of the following are true:

- The board has looked at copies of, or been formally briefed about, the administration's plans for accomplishing the current district goals.
- The written plans state what result the board will see after implementation and include time lines for implementation, procedures for assessing effectiveness, and a schedule for progress reports to the board.
- Agenda records and board minutes indicate the board has formally discussed the plans with the superintendent during a board meeting within the last 12 months and is comfortable with the stated result the board can expect to see.

Where can we get help?

If you have questions about the board's becoming familiar with district plans that cannot be answered locally, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800 580-8272.

3. Board Actions Reinforce the Central Importance of the Goals to the Work of the District

3.1 Deliberation on major items before the board routinely includes a discussion of the recommended action's impact on meeting district goals.

The purpose of a vision and goals is to provide a focus for the district's work that also helps coordinate board, staff, and community efforts. To fulfill this purpose, the vision and goals must be kept in the forefront of everyone's thinking. In the day-to-day, month-to-month press of district business, it is extremely easy for a board or a staff to lose sight of the vision and goals and to find that the goals have become an afterthought as the district proceeds with its work.

One indication the board has lost sight of its goals is if the goals are raised in board meetings only during the adoption process and when the superintendent presents periodic progress reports.

To ensure that goals retain their function of focusing and guiding the district's efforts, the board should take no action on major items without first formally questioning what effect—supportive, compromising, or neutral—the action will have on the district's ability to accomplish its stated goals. This simple procedure ensures the board will not inadvertently take actions that undermine the goals; it reinforces the central importance of the goals for staff, the community, and the board itself; and it helps the board keep in mind the big picture on district affairs.

The fact that a proposed action may have a negative or neutral effect on the district's ability to accomplish its goals does not mean the board should not take the action. Many such actions are not only necessary but also advisable. Assessing those actions' effect on the goals, however, can both clarify the actions' importance to the district and keep expectations for achievement of the goals realistic.

This procedure also provides a couple of "checks" for the board with regard to its work. If the board frequently finds itself taking major discretionary action that has an adverse impact on the district's ability to meet its goals, the process for developing the goals may be flawed. Perhaps the process did not look broadly or deeply enough at district needs, or perhaps the board is simply not committed to the outcomes of the process. Similarly, if the board routinely finds that none of the items it considers during its meetings has an effect, either positive or negative, on achievement of the goals, it may want to rethink the kinds of items it places on its agenda. The board may be spending time on items of limited significance that could be handled administratively.

One type of check is absolutely critical: because board policies and district goals are the two major vehicles that structure work within the district, the board should not adopt policies without first making sure the proposed policies are consistent with district goals. If there are clear inconsistencies, the board will need to reconsider one or the other.

Performing this task of checking the impact of proposed actions on achievement of the goals can take several forms. Some superintendents routinely include such an assessment—often just a simple statement—in the agenda materials they provide for the board. If the matter is not addressed in the agenda materials, the board should simply ask a question about effect during its deliberations. The superintendent should be in a position to respond.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- Board agenda materials routinely summarize the impact agenda items will have on the achievement of current goals, or board minutes or other documents suggest the board routinely considers the impact before making decisions.
- Board procedures for adopting policy include a routine check that policies and goals are not in conflict.

Where can we get help?

If you have questions that cannot be answered locally about procedures for checking board actions against district goals, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

3. Board Actions Reinforce the Central Importance of the Goals to the Work of the District

- 3.2 The board's superintendent evaluation instrument and process focus first and foremost on the superintendent's success in addressing board-adopted goals.

If the goals for the district truly represent the board's priorities, then the superintendent should devote a significant portion of his or her time and effort as the district's educational leader and administrative manager to ensuring success in meeting them.

Correspondingly, success in reaching the goals should be a primary basis for evaluating the superintendent's job performance. Using the goals in this manner reinforces their importance, keeps the board and superintendent focused on their achievement, and provides the board with a vehicle for holding the superintendent accountable for taking concrete action to accomplish them.

The most common method for focusing the superintendent's evaluation on success in meeting district goals is to center the evaluation instrument on a set of priority performance goals for the superintendent. These performance goals clearly state the results or actions, relative to each district goal, the board expects to see at the end of the evaluation cycle as evidence that concrete actions have been taken and specific progress has been made.

Priority performance goals can be developed by the board with input from the superintendent, jointly by the board and superintendent, or by the superintendent for review and approval by the board. As a general rule, the greater the involvement of the superintendent in the development of the goals, the greater the superintendent's commitment to success.

If the board does not annually tailor its evaluation to the district goals but simply evaluates on a checklist of generic job responsibilities, the board is undermining its own planning process. The evaluation process is the board's vehicle for ensuring that concrete and sufficient action is being taken by the administration to accomplish the board's stated priorities.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if all of the following are true:

- Board agenda materials or minutes indicate the board formally discusses and adopts priority performance goals for the superintendent evaluation instrument at the beginning of the evaluation cycle.
- The board's current evaluation instrument for the superintendent includes specific performance goals for the superintendent, and the majority of those goals are clearly derived from current or former district goals.
- The board's regularly scheduled formative and summative evaluation conferences begin with reports by the superintendent on actions taken in support of the priority performance goals or with summaries of reports provided earlier.

Where can we get help?

For written information on setting superintendent evaluation goals, consult *Evaluating the Superintendent: A Guide to Appraising Your District's Chief Administrator*. Texas Association of School Boards. © 1999

For sample priority performance goals, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

Facilitation services for setting priority performance goals for the superintendent are available from TASB Leadership Team Services, from several of the 20 regional ESCs, and from private consultants.

TASB periodically offers sessions on evaluating superintendent performance at its regional and statewide training events.

3. Board Actions Reinforce the Central Importance of the Goals to the Work of the District

- 3.3 The board's budget review process specifically identifies how goals are funded in the proposed budget, whether funding is adequate, and whether funding priorities are consistent with board-adopted goals.

The district's budget is sometimes called a financial picture of the district plan. If the district goals truly represent the priorities of the board, their importance should be reflected in the budget the board adopts. If the goals are not adequately funded, they will not be achieved. If funding of the goals is restricted in favor of other projects, then the stated goals may not reflect the district's true priorities.

District budgets are, of course, huge and complex, and the vast majority of funds in any district budget go to supporting the staff needed to deliver the basic instructional program. Funding for the district goals—that is, for the specific activities that will occur in the coming year in support of the goals—should be clearly identified for the board's review. The board needs to know what actions are being funded to support achievement of the goals and where that funding appears in its budget. It must assess the adequacy of that funding and whether the funding is appropriate for the priority the goal is expected to have.

This information can be highlighted in budget materials in many different ways. The materials can contain a list of the goals, with breakdowns of the activities to be funded, how much will be spent on each, and where in the budget the money resides. They can contain comparison tables on the amount to be spent on each goal this year, relative to previous years. They can include a more comprehensive list of new additions to the budget and their anticipated cost, with those additions related to district goals highlighted in some special way.

Any of these methods is appropriate and can be sufficient. The bottom line is that the board must know what activities are being funded in support of the district goals and how much is being allotted for those activities. It also must discuss the adequacy of this funding in its budget deliberations. Not all activities in support of a goal require specific funding; however, if no funds are allotted for the achievement of a goal, the board should be sure the superintendent shares its expectations relative to that goal.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- Board agenda materials or minutes indicate that the board annually discusses budget priorities with the superintendent in advance of the superintendent's budget preparation.
- Budget review materials used in adopting the current district budget clearly identify the funding associated with each district goal.

Where can we get help?

For sample documents identifying funding for district goals, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

TASB periodically offers sessions on the board's role in adopting a budget at its regional and statewide training events.

4. The Board Monitors Plan Implementation and District Success in a Formal, Scheduled Manner

4.1 Time lines in the plans for reporting to the board are incorporated into the board's annual activity calendar and included on appropriate monthly agendas.

If the board is truly invested in the goals it has adopted for the district, it will want to receive periodic reports from the administration on efforts being made in support of the goals and the success being achieved. Such reports assure the board that the goals really function as district priorities, and they keep the importance of these priorities before the minds of the trustees, the administration, and the community.

The superintendent is responsible for developing and implementing plans to achieve the goals and for monitoring their effectiveness. Concrete, well-developed plans will include appropriate times for reporting to the board on progress and effectiveness. The reports can be written or oral, but, in either case, the board should have an opportunity to discuss them as an agenda item in a meeting.

These reports need not be extensive—especially if information is presented to the board routinely as part of an agenda item, as is the case with certain types of goals, such as building projects—nor do they need to be frequent. The board should receive a formal and summary report on each goal at least once a year or more frequently, as appropriate.

If the board is not receiving reports on efforts under way to achieve goals and progress toward success, the stated goals may not reflect the district's true priorities.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- Board agendas or minutes from the past 12 months indicate the board received and formally discussed at least one report of progress on district goals.
- The board's calendar for the coming year includes months in which such reports will be heard, or the board can point to another document that clearly shows when reports on plan implementation and progress will be made to the board.

Where can we get help?

For sample board annual calendars, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

If you have questions that cannot be answered locally about scheduling progress reports or about their nature, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

4. The Board Monitors Plan Implementation and District Success in a Formal, Scheduled Manner

4.2 The board reviews the appropriateness, adequacy, and usefulness of the reports annually with the superintendent.

Boards sometimes find themselves presented with reports that are so data-intensive or so detailed they cannot discern the information they most need to have about plan implementation and success. Similarly, boards sometimes receive reports that focus so extensively on specific programs being used to achieve the goal that measures of the success of the program or questions of efficiency are overlooked.

Given the preparation that has gone into the reports, boards are sometimes reluctant to tell the superintendent that the reports are not meeting the board's needs.

Likewise, members of a given board sometimes have different ideas about the scope and extent of the information they need before they can believe the district is moving forward on the goals. Though some members are content with the information they are receiving, others, finding the information inadequate, raise numerous questions about data or issues not included in the report.

These two situations are inefficient, both for the board and the administration.

It is crucial that the board and superintendent discuss briefly, once a year, the types of information the board received about the goals over the past year and which information was and was not useful. The board and superintendent should also come to agreement about the nature and extent of information to be presented in the future. Using past reports as the basis for this discussion is an effective and efficient way to structure the discussion. Such discussions are crucial if future reports are to be useful to the board and not take up undue administrative time or board attention.

A good time to do this is shortly after the reorganization of the board, when new board members can have a voice in the conversation and will know what to expect in the way of information later in the year.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- Board agendas or minutes from the past 12 months indicate the board and superintendent discussed operating procedures, or the board and superintendent can point to guidelines the superintendent or board has developed for use in providing information or reports to the board.
- The board's annual activity calendar or another written document listing routine board work indicates the board and superintendent conduct an annual review of operating procedures or agenda materials.

Where can we get help?

If you have questions that cannot be answered locally about review of information, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

Oversight of Management

Texas statute assigns authority to the superintendent to manage the day-to-day operations of the district. It assigns to the board, as a body corporate, the duty of **overseeing** the management of the district.

It is critical for successful functioning of a board-superintendent team that the distinction between managing and overseeing the management of the district is clear and formalized. Failure to define clearly and to formalize these two activities so they are exclusive of one another will lead to misunderstandings, inefficiency, and possible conflict between the superintendent and board members. Micromanagement by boards, when it occurs, is usually a product of the failure of the board and superintendent to define adequately the difference between the two activities. Micromanagement by individual trustees usually occurs when the board has not fully established appropriate vehicles for the board to oversee management as a body corporate.

A simple but effective way to characterize these two distinct activities is as follows:

Management consists of three activities:

- Putting plans, procedures, programs, and systems in place to achieve a clearly defined, desired result
- Monitoring those plans, procedures, programs, and systems against appropriate benchmarks or measures of effectiveness
- Changing the plans, procedures, etc. if they are not proving successful in achieving the desired result

Oversight of management consists of three related activities:

- Making sure there are clearly defined, desired results in place for the major areas under management
- Making sure the clearly defined, desired results are appropriate
- Making sure that plans, procedures, programs, or systems are in place, that they are monitored, and that they are changed if necessary

Essentially, oversight of management is the process of making sure the manager is doing the job of systematic management.

Notice that oversight of management does not involve second-guessing individual decisions the manager makes nor passing judgment on plans the manager puts in place. When a superintendent is managing systematically, the desired result will drive decision making, and the manager's acts of monitoring the plans and procedures against appropriate benchmarks will do the job of passing judgment on the effectiveness of the plans. Boards that second-guess individual management actions rather than focusing on the superintendent's success in setting up management

structures to guide decisions do not further the cause of good management in the district over the long term.

This section of the audit focuses on specific, formal tasks that help the board fulfill its oversight of management responsibility effectively, without intruding into the management function.

Many of these tasks may be new both to boards and to superintendents. A board should not be surprised if a superintendent has not fully formalized the basis on which he or she measures effectiveness and efficiency in the different areas of operations, even though the superintendent may have a very good idea of which areas are operating effectively and which are not. Likewise, many boards, unaware of how different oversight of management is from management itself, will not have performed some of these tasks in the past.

The statutory distinction between management and oversight of management is a relatively recent one, and board-superintendent teams are only now beginning to understand effective and appropriate ways to distinguish between them and to formalize the distinction. The act of doing so, however, is crucial for ensuring that each entity carries out its responsibility in an appropriate and efficient manner.

5. Goals, Standards, and/or Benchmarks Have Been Established for Major Aspects of District Operations

- 5.1 The board receives information annually from the superintendent on the goals, standards, or benchmarks the administration uses to assess effectiveness for the major areas of district operations.

As the manager of the district, the superintendent should ask and answer certain questions about the major areas of district operations. "What are we trying to accomplish in this area of district operations? How can we assess if we are succeeding? And what standard of performance are we aiming at?"

With its transportation program (a quite significant operations area for many Texas districts), for example, the district is probably trying to accomplish more than simply getting the students to school. It's probably trying to get them there on time; to get them there safely, conveniently, and in a proper frame of mind to learn; and to do so within a reasonable budget.

A major part of the superintendent's job is to determine how to measure or assess effectiveness in this area and to determine the standard of performance being sought.

A major part of the board's job, as the overseer of management, is to make sure the superintendent has answered these questions and make sure it is comfortable with the desired results for operations the superintendent has established. The board will use these standards to guide its own deliberations on budgets, policy recommendations, and other issues related to operations that may come before the board.

It's important, then, that boards be familiar with the measures or means the administration uses to assess effectiveness and efficiency in the major areas of operations and the standards of performance the administration expects. These standards can exist as operations goals, standards, or benchmarks.

Most boards get information of this sort from time to time, but they get it piecemeal and haphazardly, usually in response to a specific concern or specific request that has come before the board. For example, a request from the superintendent for additional food service staff will sometimes elicit information about how the superintendent assesses efficiency in the food services program. Getting the information in the context of a particular decision is useful but not the most fruitful time for discussing it.

A much better way for the board to perform this oversight task is to ask the superintendent to provide information about how he or she measures

effectiveness and efficiency in major areas of district operations and what standards or targets are in place. The more information that exists in writing, the better. The board can then refer to it while performing its other oversight functions. It is also useful for the board to review this information once a year, even if just briefly and even if only to reaffirm the standards and ensure the board remains familiar with them.

The primary purpose of getting this information is not to question the standards or approve them but simply to be assured that standards for performance in operations are in place and performance is being measured. If the board as a whole is not comfortable either with the **bases** on which the superintendent measures effectiveness of operations or with the **standards** for which the superintendent is shooting, it should discuss its concerns. The board's and superintendent's expectations need to be compatible. Such discussions, if necessary, are much easier to have in the neutral context of an annual, routine review than in the context of a specific concern or request before the board.

Which are the major areas of district operations? Even in a very small school district, the number of operational functions the superintendent is responsible for is immense. They include curriculum design and coordination, human resources, student services, maintenance, transportation, and food services, to name a few. The board and superintendent need to decide locally which areas should be reported to the board. Generally, these will be the areas of district operations that have the greatest potential effect on the instructional program or the greatest effect on the district budget.

How does the board know if the measures and standards the superintendent uses are appropriate? In most areas of district operations, there are many different and useful ways to measure success, and **no one** is clearly the best. The board should simply be concerned that **some** reasonable basis for assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of operations is in place and is guiding administrative decision making. It need not be concerned that the absolute **best** or most comprehensive method of assessment is used.

A general rule of thumb is simply to use common sense. Does the standard seem reasonable? Does it seem to provide a good basis for guiding the superintendent's and staff's decisions about how to carry out the function and how to improve effectiveness or efficiency? If the board as a whole has any concerns about the appropriateness of the measures or standards, it may ask the superintendent to provide comparison information from other, similar districts. How do they measure effectiveness and, if they use similar measures, how do they stack up against us?

In a few areas of district operations, such as custodial staffing and food service efficiency, certain measures are becoming fairly standard means for gauging operational success. These are being used in the school performance reviews conducted by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. A growing number of private consulting firms in Texas have also developed standard measures and benchmarks they use in assessing operations efficiency in Texas public schools.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- Board agenda materials or minutes from the past 12 months indicate the board and superintendent formally discussed goals, standards, or benchmarks the superintendent uses in assessing operational effectiveness in major areas.
- The board can point to a document or documents outlining the measures used by the administration to assess success in at least three major areas of district operations.

Where can we get help?

For information on common measures of effectiveness in some areas of district operations, check copies of the Texas School Performance Review from sample districts. These can be viewed on the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts Web Site at www.cpa.state.tx.us/m26edu.html.

TASB periodically offers sessions on the board's role in overseeing the management of the district at its regional and statewide training events.

5. Goals, Standards, and/or Benchmarks Have Been Established for Major Aspects of District Operations

5.2 The board receives regular, scheduled updates on operations effectiveness as measured against standards or benchmarks.

Oversight of management is fundamentally a task of ensuring the superintendent is successfully performing the basic job of a manager—putting plans, procedures, programs, and systems in place to accomplish a clearly defined, desired result; monitoring success; and changing the plans if necessary.

In addition to making sure a clearly defined, desired result is in place—in the form of standards, benchmarks, or goals the administration is shooting for in operations—the board should periodically receive updates on how well the district is doing in meeting these standards.

In receiving these reports, the board’s purpose is not to question **how** the superintendent has gone about reaching the expected standards but simply to make sure the superintendent is monitoring success relative to the desired results and making changes if standards or benchmarks are not being met. If the superintendent is monitoring and changing, the superintendent is already questioning and assessing the “how.”

Such reports needn’t be frequent, but they should occur at appropriate intervals and should be included on the board’s annual calendar of activities. One good time for such reports is in the months just before annual budget deliberations, because such reports can expedite discussion of significant changes in budget recommendations for the operation of the district. These reports can also occur in conjunction with the board’s review of the standards mentioned in 5.1.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if the following is true:

- Board agenda materials or minutes indicate that the board received a report on operations success relative to established standards or benchmarks within the last 12 months.

Where can we get help?

If you have questions about reports on operations success that cannot be answered locally, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

6. The Board Is Familiar with the Broad Outlines of the Systems the Superintendent Has Put in Place to Manage District Operations

- 6.1 The board and superintendent have a schedule for periodic updates on major management systems in the district, including presentations on how benchmark data is used to plan improvements.

The major job of the superintendent as manager of the district is to put plans, programs, procedures, and systems in place to accomplish clearly defined, desired results. The transportation program is not haphazard—neither is the instructional assessment program nor the employee recruiting program. Personnel and tasks are structured in a certain way, there are guidelines and procedures in place, and there are routine activities to be performed. All of these management systems are expected to contribute toward effective performance as defined by the measures and standards the superintendent has established.

It is exclusively the superintendent's job, not the board's, to design these programs and monitor their implementation. However, it is useful for the board occasionally to be given basic information on how major programs are run and how the systems work. This kind of information is helpful to the board in making sure the superintendent and administration have thought through the needs of the district and responded in a comprehensive way. It builds confidence in the superintendent's management abilities and can help board members in responding appropriately and expeditiously to questions from patrons.

Briefings on the major operational systems—such as food services, maintenance, human resources, and curriculum development and assessment—need not be frequent. Once every few years for most areas is adequate. They certainly needn't be exhaustive. The board needs information to help it understand how the function is organized so that needs are recognized, decisions are made in a timely and informed manner, and improvement is planned for.

Although such briefings needn't be frequent, they should be scheduled. Most boards get information of this sort in the midst of a crisis or in response to a specific request or concern. These are usually not good contexts for the board to receive such information and are often contexts that invite micromanagement. A written, multiyear schedule—perhaps incorporated into or appended to the board's annual activity calendar, or appearing as part of an administrative document or administrative procedure—can be helpful in making sure such briefings are not overlooked.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- Board agenda materials or minutes indicate the board received a briefing on at least one major management system within the past 12 months.
- The board can point to a document with a schedule for briefings on major management systems.

Where can we get help?

If the board has questions on briefings that can't be answered locally, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

6. The Board Is Familiar with the Broad Outlines of the Systems the Superintendent Has Put in Place to Manage District Operations

- 6.2 The board's evaluation of the superintendent's performance in district operations areas focuses on the superintendent's success in establishing appropriate measures and standards for performance; putting effective plans, programs, procedures, or systems in place; monitoring success; and using data for improvement.

The board's annual evaluation of superintendent performance should focus foremost on the superintendent's success in meeting priority performance goals, as those reflect the board's priorities for the superintendent. Generally, priority performance goals are tied to district goals, including those that address student achievement.

Beyond these goals, the evaluation should concentrate on the superintendent's success as the manager of the district. It should focus on whether the superintendent has put plans, programs, procedures, and systems in place to achieve desired results in the major areas of district operations; whether the standards are appropriate; how effectively the plans are monitored; and whether data from the monitoring is used to plan improvements.

This focus on management is the proper oversight perspective. It helps the board avoid a common tendency to put undue emphasis on management style or to second-guess individual decisions rather than to look at whether the superintendent is effectively performing the basic tasks of systems management.

Most boards have evaluation instruments that consist of two parts: (1) the priority performance goals for the superintendent and (2) a checklist of management and leadership duties broken down by areas of district operations, such as instructional management, personnel management, and fiscal and facilities management.

The items on this checklist should clearly focus on the establishment and monitoring of systems and standards and on the use of standards to guide decision making and plan for improvement. Although other items can certainly be included on the checklist, these should form the bulk of the evaluation.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if the following is true:

- Exclusive of priority performance goals, at least one-third of the items on the board's most recently used evaluation instrument focus on the superintendent's effectiveness in establishing appropriate standards in the major areas of district operations; putting appropriate mechanisms in place to achieve those standards; monitoring for success; and using results to plan improvements.

Where can we get help?

For written information on developing an effective superintendent evaluation instrument and process, consult *Evaluating the Superintendent: A Guide to Appraising Your District's Chief Administrator*. Texas Association of School Boards. © 1999

For facilitation services in reviewing and revising your superintendent evaluation process and instrument, contact TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

For a sample evaluation instrument, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

Board-Superintendent Team Operations

Local school boards are expected to work as a body corporate. This form of working, which is highly unusual for most of us, is much more difficult than we normally acknowledge.

For any group to function effectively as a body corporate, two conditions must exist:

1. There must be a set of shared assumptions and expectations behind the group's work, or at least all members must be aware of each other's assumptions.
2. There must be clearly defined procedures for how the group goes about doing its work.

For a board, familiarity with each member's assumptions and expectations is necessary so that members have contexts for understanding the intent of each other's actions. They need to know, to the extent possible, where each other is "coming from." Absent this awareness, members are likely to mistake each other's intent, and personal conflict can result.

The more fully the members' respective expectations are held in common, the easier the work will be because the group starts its deliberations from a more extensive base of agreement. Even if the members do not agree in their assumptions and expectations, the more fully these have been articulated for each other, the easier it will be for the board to keep policy differences separate from personal ones.

Clearly delineated work procedures ensure that the board functions efficiently in its corporate capacity. Absent work procedures, team members will end up duplicating effort, acting inconsistently from one moment to the next, overlooking important tasks, and stepping in each other's way.

Far more than in a vocational work situation, where one can count on the person next highest in the organization to resolve confusion or conflict over work procedures, working as a body corporate demands that the members agree on procedures in advance, because no one member has the authority to dictate or decide them.

Boards frequently make a fundamental mistake of assuming that everyone knows what each expects and that everyone knows the procedures for doing the board's work. Consultants who work with boards note this is rarely the case.

A shared vision and goals and familiarity with the superintendent's standards of performance for district operations certainly help in clarifying expectations and establishing common ground for the board's doing its work. However, the board and superintendent also need to check assumptions regularly about how they are going about their work and what they can expect of each other in doing it.

This section of the audit concentrates on activities that form a foundation for smooth and efficient board operations.

7. The Board and Superintendent Team Regularly Checks Expectations and Assesses Board-Superintendent Operations

7.1 The board and superintendent participate in an annual team-building activity focused on a self-assessment.

Any organization that expects to operate effectively will periodically engage in some form of self-assessment of its work. For a group expected to function as a body corporate, periodic self-assessment is critical.

The State Board of Education (SBOE) rule on board member continuing education requires all board members and the superintendent to participate together each year in a team-building session designed to enhance the effectiveness of the group. The rule gives boards wide latitude about the nature of the team-building session. The clear intent of SBOE was that the board and superintendent use this time to examine their work—to determine if they are working effectively and efficiently and where they need to improve.

In most cases, the most valuable way the board and superintendent can spend their team-building time is assessing how well they conducted past work and in articulating and checking expectations for the future. What do board members expect of each other? What does the board expect of the superintendent? What does the superintendent expect of the board? What does the board expect its meetings to be like? What do board members and the superintendent expect of each other between meetings? What issues did the board handle well this past year; which did it handle poorly? What made the difference? How well-informed was the board to make the decisions it needed to make? What do the trustees and the superintendent think are the critical issues currently facing the district or the board?

The number of issues that can be usefully explored is far too great to be addressed in any given session. The board must make sure the assessment and expectation-checking activity is carefully limited in scope and clearly structured. A few of the forms the activity can take include an assessment of board-superintendent operating procedures, an identification of the critical issues facing the district or the board, an assessment of communication styles among the members, or a review of the board's responsibilities with an assessment of how the board spends its time.

As a general rule, any self-assessment by the board and superintendent, no matter what its scope, is most successful if facilitated by an outside party. The outside facilitator can often help the group see expectations that have gone unstated, can suggest ways to work with differences, and can ensure the assessment exercise is brought to a useful close. However, an outside facilitator is not required by the rule.

Self-assessment in some form, and the discussion of expectations it entails, should be an annual board activity. Using the annual team-building requirement as the time for self-assessment is a useful way to institutionalize this practice.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- Board agenda materials or minutes indicate the board and superintendent participated together in a team-building session or self-assessment discussion during the past 12 months.
- Written documents or reports from the team-building session or self-assessment indicate the session included review of actual board practices and behaviors and resulted in agreements about future operations.

Where can we get help?

For information on the continuing education rule, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

Facilitation services for team-building sessions focused on self-assessment are available from TASB Leadership Team Services, the 20 regional ESCs, and a number of private consultants.

If the board-superintendent team wants to conduct a self-assessment without an outside facilitator, a self-assessment kit can be purchased from the TASB Publications Department, 800-580-8272, extension 2290.

TASB periodically offers sessions on conducting a board self-assessment at its regional and statewide training events.

7. The Board and Superintendent Team Regularly Checks Expectations and Assesses Board-Superintendent Operations

- 7.2 The team-building activity concludes with written plans or priorities for continuing education by the board and by individual trustees for the year.

SBOE's rule on continuing education for trustees requires that the annual team-building activity include an assessment of additional continuing education needs among the board members. The team-building requirement has not been fulfilled until the assessment takes place. The idea behind this requirement is that continuing education needs will be especially clear as the team-building activity concludes.

The group is expected to review the Framework for School Board Development and identify the items listed on the Framework that individual board members or the group as a whole would benefit from knowing more about. The identified items are expected to form the core of the board members' continuing education in the coming year.

The rule does not require that the board or individual trustees develop written plans for continuing education. However, if the board intends its continuing education efforts to be of clear value, these plans should be written and shared among members of the team. Documenting the plans as a group ensures board members have a meaningful focus for their continuing education, helps them arrange to meet their training needs, and provides a vehicle for the board's holding itself accountable for following up on stated needs.

Written plans can take any number of forms. At a minimum, they should include the topics for which continuing education will be sought. Ideally, they also would include time lines for completing the continuing education and the desired outcome to be achieved. Listing desired outcomes up front in the plans can help the board assess whether its continuing education activities actually met its needs.

A board that does not pursue continuing education in a planned and documented way, based on identified needs, is not practicing the kind of systematic continuous improvement it expects of its staff.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- Board agenda materials, board minutes, or documents related to the most recent team-building session indicate the board formally discussed continuing education needs as a part of its team-building activity.
- The board can point to written plans for continuing education for its members that include, at a minimum, the topics to be addressed.

Where can we get help?

A copy of the Framework for School Board Development is included in most TASB localized policy manuals at BBD. It can also be viewed on the TASB Web Site. Go to www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

For a sample form for written continuing education plans, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

Information on continuing education offerings for board members is available from the various registered providers. For information on TASB services, go to the

TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Training or call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

7. The Board and Superintendent Team Regularly Checks Expectations and Assesses Board-Superintendent Operations

- 7.3 The effectiveness of the team-building activity and the success of board members in meeting their continuing education plans are reviewed as a formal agenda item six to 10 months after the activity.

If the board is going to invest the time, district resources, and emotional energy required for a team-building activity, the result should be more visibly efficient work or improved team relations. These changes must be sustained over time before the activity can be counted a success.

Six to 10 months after the team-building session, the board should formally review whether the team-building session has resulted in beneficial change for the board and superintendent. The review can be brief and need not be extensive, but board members should have an opportunity to discuss whether the activity has proved to be of lasting value. If the board has not followed up on commitments it made as a result of the session, the review is an appropriate time to reaffirm them or change them if appropriate. If the activity has proved to be of no lasting value, the board can begin to think actively about what type of team-building activity it should pursue in the coming year to ensure the effort is worthwhile.

At this time, the board should do a quick review of how members are doing in completing their continuing education plans. If board members still have unfulfilled elements on their plans, the board can discuss opportunities for fulfilling them during the remainder of the year.

It is important that the board engage in such a review as a formal matter, both to ensure that future team-building activities are well-chosen and worthwhile and to demonstrate the board's own commitment to systematic, continuous improvement.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if the following is true:

- Board agenda materials or minutes from the last 12 months indicate the board and superintendent participated in a formal follow-up of the team-building session, or the board's annual activity calendar clearly indicates that such a review will appear on the board's agenda within the next six months.

Where can we get help?

For information on questions that cannot be answered locally about conducting a six- to 10-month review of the team-building session, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

7. The Board and Superintendent Team Regularly Checks Expectations and Assesses Board-Superintendent Operations

7.4 The board has adopted and annually reaffirms an ethics statement or code of conduct for board members.

One good way for the board to articulate and agree on certain basic assumptions and expectations about its functioning is to adopt a code of conduct or a statement of ethical principles for its individual members to follow. Such a statement outlines basic ideals in behavior board members intend to be guided by.

The value of adopting a code of conduct or ethics statement is not simply in having an ideal against which to measure board member actions. It also lies in the discussion among the members in deciding what to include in the document. Few types of discussion are more fruitful in helping board members to understand the personal priorities and motivations of their body corporate colleagues. Such understanding can be crucial in isolating potential sources of conflict.

Any such document the board adopts should be adopted by unanimous consent. If any board member cannot consent to be governed by each principle on the document, the board must continue working on the document until unanimous consent is reached. If unanimous consent cannot be reached, the board should not adopt such a document.

Once adopted, the board should reaffirm annually the document to ensure that all members continue to agree to be governed by it. This is especially necessary if there are new members on the board who were not part of the initial adoption.

Many boards adopt their ethics statement or code of conduct as a matter of district policy. If the board can reach unanimous agreement, adoption as policy is a good idea. It sets a clear example for the staff and community to follow and respect. Alternatively, the board may wish simply to include the statement as part of its written operating procedures or in a board handbook.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- The board can point to a code of conduct or ethics statement that has been formally adopted by the board.
- Board agenda materials or minutes indicate all current members of the board have affirmed the statement, or the board's calendar of activities includes reaffirmation of the ethics statement or code of conduct as an agenda item within the next six months.

Where can we get help?

Check your TASB localized policy manual at BBF for any code of conduct or ethics statement for board members currently under adoption.

For a sample board member ethics statement, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

TASB periodically offers sessions on board member ethics at its regional and statewide training events.

8. Written Operating Procedures for the Board and Superintendent Are in Place

8.1 A written annual calendar of board events, outlining major board activities by month, is in place.

A crucial tool for smooth operations by the board is a written, annual calendar of board events.

Such calendars are normally broken down by month and list, for each month, the activities the board is expected to perform. For example, a budget hearing might appear on the calendar for August, a formative evaluation conference with the superintendent in June, the summative conference in January, and the call for election in February. In a large district, the calendar might include a report from the superintendent on recruiting success in April or May. The annual review and adoption of district goals would appear in whatever month the board and administration find it most useful to conclude the goal-setting process.

Ideally, the calendar also will contain notations by month of what information and reports the board will receive, such as updates on district goal progress or results from TAAS testing. It can also contain reminders of major district events.

A written, annual calendar serves several purposes. Among them, it

- Helps the board, especially new board members, know what to expect at any given time of year
- Ensures the board does not overlook any major responsibilities
- Helps the board prepare in advance for the regular tasks an effective board performs
- Assists the board and administration in judiciously scheduling their work
- Ensures the board receives the regular information on district progress and operations success

Calendars can take many forms. The crucial issues are that the calendar be (1) comprehensive, (2) consulted regularly in planning the board's work, and (3) followed. The calendar should be reviewed once a year to make sure items continue to be scheduled for appropriate and workable times. A good time to review the calendar is shortly after board elections.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- All members of the board have copies of a written, 12-month calendar on which major board responsibilities have been scheduled.
- At least 75 percent of the board tasks on the calendar for the past 12 months were performed in the months scheduled or were rescheduled on the calendar for another specific time.

Where can we get help?

For sample annual calendars, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

If you have questions about the construction of an annual calendar that cannot be answered locally, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.

8. Written Operating Procedures for the Board and Superintendent Are in Place

- 8.2 Operating procedures are codified in a written board-superintendent procedures document; new board members are oriented to operating procedures within the first 60 days of service.

Boards frequently assume that standard procedures for carrying out common or regular board tasks are known and shared by all members of the board and by the superintendent. This assumption is based on the apparent lack of confusion or conflict in how board members go about their work.

Unfortunately, this assumption is more often mistaken than not. The lack of shared understanding and acceptance about board operating procedures can lead to inefficiency, inconsistency in trustee actions, failure to carry out important tasks, and possible conflict among board members.

For example, most boards have adopted “chain of command” policies for handling complaints in the district, and board members know that if a patron or staff member approaches them with a complaint, they should refer the person to the appropriate official in the chain of command. But should they also inform the superintendent they have made the referral so the superintendent is aware? Are there certain cases in which they should do this and others in which it is not necessary? If they do notify the superintendent, should they expect to hear anything back about the resolution of the complaint?

These questions are not addressed in policy and needn't be, as they concern the board's internal agreements about ways to expedite the board's and superintendent's work. But if they are not answered uniformly, they can lead to inefficiency, misunderstanding, and possible embarrassment for the board. They should be discussed among the board and superintendent, decided, and codified in a written board operating procedure. Once the matter is codified, there can be no confusion among trustees about how to proceed when they receive a complaint.

Written procedures are especially helpful to new board members and superintendents. They help new members of the team avoid having to learn operations by trial and error—an inefficient and unnecessarily painful process.

Written procedures can take many forms. Any form for written procedures can work as long as what is written meets the following criteria:

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- The procedure is expressed in terms of observable behaviors—what the board, board member, or superintendent is actually expected to do or not do.
 - The board has discussed what the behaviors mean, so any significant areas of ambiguity have been clarified in the language and an appropriate level of detail has been reached.
 - The procedures are readily accessible by the board and superintendent.

With regard to this last point, some boards have developed a procedures document; others have board member handbooks; a few have asked to have board operating procedures incorporated into the superintendent's administrative regulations manual in appropriate spots. Any of these is acceptable. The board and superintendent need to decide locally how best to make written procedures available.

The question of what topics to cover in board operating procedures also needs to be decided locally. As a general matter, written procedures can be beneficial for three types of board activity:

1. Regular board functions the community has a major interest or a part in. For example:
 - Development or review of the district vision
 - Adoption of district goals
 - Review and adoption of the district budget
2. Routine board member activities that are subject to misunderstanding by the community or district staff. For example:
 - Visits to campuses
 - Board member communications with the media
 - Board member communications with district staff
3. Internal board communications. For example:
 - Time lines for placing items on the agenda and receiving agenda packets
 - Requests for additional information about agenda items
 - Board member travel and expense reimbursement

A board procedures document or board handbook should be a living document. It should be expanded or changed as circumstances require.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if all of the following are true:

- The board can point to written board operating procedures that address at least five of the nine issues listed in the examples above.
- The operating procedures are stated in terms of observable actions: what the board, trustee, or superintendent is actually expected to do or not do.
- Any members who have joined the board-superintendent team within the last 12 months have copies of all written board operating procedures.

Where can we get help?

For sample board-superintendent operating procedures and a list of useful issues to address through procedures, go to the TASB Web Site at www.tasb.org and click on Online Resources, Online Library, TASB Board Effectiveness Audit.

Facilitation services for developing board-superintendent operating procedures are available from TASB Leadership Team Services, many of the 20 regional ESCs, and many private consultants.

TASB periodically offers sessions on developing board-superintendent operating procedures at its regional and statewide training events.

8. Written Operating Procedures for the Board and Superintendent Are in Place

8.3 An annual review of operating procedures is included on the board activity calendar.

Board-superintendent operating procedures should be reviewed once a year to make sure they are still benefiting the team. The review needn't be extensive, but members should have an opportunity to comment on any procedures they think can be improved.

The board can simply reaffirm most procedures without discussion. However, certain procedures merit a closer look each year. In particular, the board and superintendent should discuss whether procedures for board-superintendent communications are meeting both the board's and the superintendent's needs.

A good time for this review is after board elections, when new board members have joined the team. The discussion can form part of their required orientation to the local district. A more thorough review, including development of additional, needed procedures is one option for the annual team-building session.

Can we check off this item?

You may check off this item if both of the following are true:

- A review of operating procedures is included on the board's annual calendar of activities.
- Board agenda materials, minutes, or other documents indicate the board and superintendent have formally discussed operating procedures within the past 12 months.

Where can we get help?

If you have questions about reviewing operating procedures that cannot be answered locally, call TASB Leadership Team Services, 800-580-8272.