



This bulletin, produced by TASB Leadership Team Services, examines research and shares philosophies to inform and promote exceptional governance within school boards across Texas.

The Priority of Superintendent Performance Goals

by Phil Gore, PhD, Division Director of Leadership Team Services

Conveying the Importance

School boards and their governance of schools makes a difference when it comes to student outcomes. Beliefs and actions of school board members relate to student performance. When school board members believe all students can learn at a higher level, they act in ways that reinforce the potential of each and every student. The result is increased student success. One action school boards can take to help students achieve at high levels is holding the superintendent accountable for student performance.

Understanding the Research

When school boards have “improve student performance” incorporated into the superintendent’s goals for evaluation, students actually learn more. Ivan Lorentzen, a trustee and researcher in Montana, studied the relationship between school board actions and student performance. He compared board member responses on a 69-question survey with actual student achievement data. Ivan found that the greatest correlation between

school board actions and student learning was having goals for the superintendent tied to increasing improved student performance.

The second-strongest correlation that Ivan found was that when the board communicated the superintendent’s performance goals to the community, student achievement improved. Making these goals public increased the level of accountability for the superintendent and district, leading to improved student performance.

Bob Marzano and Tim Waters also conducted research that indicated superintendent goals should be set collaboratively with both the board and superintendent, ideally also including input from others in the school system. Bob and Tim emphasized the alignment of superintendent goals with the work and goals of the board and also stressed the importance of focusing on improving student performance.

Taking the Extra Steps

The way school boards govern makes a difference when it comes to student performance. When

they believe all students can learn at a high level, they must set clear expectations for the superintendent regarding student learning and hold him or her accountable for improving student performance.

When superintendents believe what they do makes a difference for student learning, they may welcome the opportunity to work with the board to set goals for improving student performance. Regardless, the school board needs to communicate expectations and hold the superintendent accountable for results.

Embracing the Process

It is important to remember that goals are simply a guide to an endpoint. Business author Jim Collins suggested that it can take a few years to establish purposeful, well-written goals. The point is to start somewhere and be less concerned with what adults think and more concerned with the students and their achievement. After all, the overarching goal of both board members and superintendents everywhere should be lifelong student success.