



Indicator: The school board and superintendent present a unified vision for school improvement.
(8)

Explanation: Schools in need of improvement need district leadership that provides a comprehensive framework of improvement processes and support. The district's school board and superintendent must develop a unified vision of improvement, and ensure that all improvement efforts are aligned and directed towards non-negotiable improvement goals. Superintendents must collaborate with their school boards to ensure that they do not work at cross-purposes, and divert attention or resources away from district goals. Effective school boards actively communicate and sell the district's vision to all education stakeholders, and are well-versed in the district's improvement efforts and their role in supporting them.

Questions: Does your district have a clear vision that reflects that all students can be academically successful with proper supports? Are all district stakeholders given a voice in the development of the vision and the direction of improvement efforts? How are improvement plans communicated to stakeholders? Do your school board and superintendent collaborate effectively and represent a united effort towards improving schools? Is your school board aware of school reform initiatives and their role in supporting them?

Districts that are highly supportive of school improvement articulate and communicate to the community both a vision and a set of goals and practices that send a clear message of what district schools are to be about (Education Writers Association, 2003; SREB, 2010). These districts involve the entire community in developing this vision, and elicit principal and teacher-leader input on major district policies, instructional and curricular changes, and district budget decisions such as how professional development monies are to be spent. Supportive districts also must ensure that vision and goals reflect high expectations for all groups of students (Hanover Research, 2014; SREB, 2010). It is essential that the superintendent and school board are "on the same page" regarding the district's vision for school improvement.

Effective superintendents are highly supportive of school improvement and articulate and communicate to the community both a vision and a set of goals and practices that send a clear message of what district schools are to be about (SREB, 2010). In a comprehensive meta-analysis of superintendent research, Waters and Marzano (2006) found that effective superintendents targeted their efforts towards creating goal-oriented districts by assuming responsibility for a number of practices, including ensuring that the school board's goals are aligned with and support district goals. These superintendents collaborate with their boards so that the board's goals do not conflict with those of the district, and divert attention or key resources away from district goals (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

An effective school board is also important to improved student learning outcomes (Delagardelle, 2008). School boards play an active role in setting vision and direction for school reform by communicating and selling the vision for improvement to the community, talking with community members to gather input, and using these ideas in collaboration with the superintendent and other district leaders to refine the improvement plan (Cawelti & Protheroe,

2007). Effective school boards “lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust” (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011). The board-superintendent relationship is an important one (Plough, 2014), and it is vital that the school board and superintendent collaborate on long-term planning and strategies that enhance student achievement, and agree that all students are capable of academic success (Hanover Research, 2014; Land, 2002). Togneri and Anderson (2003) found through case studies of high-achieving districts that effective school boards identified brief vision statements (e.g., “All students will achieve on grade level”) and used them in public and staff communications and presentations, while also adopting broad strategic plans that contained specific goals and action steps needed to achieve them.

Research on both effective and ineffective school boards and superintendents has demonstrated that while both types of board/superintendent teams viewed each other positively and exhibited caring for children’s welfare, those in high achieving districts believed their job was “to release each student’s potential” and were constantly seeking ways to improve and overcome students’ challenges (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2001; Iowa School Boards Foundation, 2008). Board members and superintendents in lower-achieving districts were more likely to accept student and district shortcomings and focus on managing the district rather than trying to improve it. Board members in higher-achieving districts were additionally more knowledgeable about school reform initiatives and their role in supporting them than their peers in lower-achieving districts (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2001; Iowa School Boards Foundation, 2008).

References and Resources

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