Board Self-Evaluation

A recent survey of administrators and policymakers revealed that most felt the greatest obstacle to achieving improved teaching and learning was the constant revision of reform plans before they were given adequate time to show progress. Leadership, specifically leadership from the state board of education, can create an atmosphere that allows reform to progress with minimum, yet appropriate, mid-course corrections. Consequently, a board must govern and discipline itself in a way that ensures a steadfast commitment to its mission and goals. To provide the appropriate level of leadership, a board must take the time to reflect on its actions over a specified period. To realize its vision and achieve its goals, a board should conduct an annual evaluation in at least the following areas:

★ Roles and responsibilities of board members;
★ Board operations; and
★ Progress toward achieving board goals.

Many state boards conduct annual planning retreats. Yet just as many fail to include a comprehensive self evaluation of the board, its operations, and its success in the implementation of its strategic plan as a focal point of the retreat. Boards are inclined to articulate their accomplishments over the previous year in a disjointed manner. Their resistance to putting their accomplishments in the context of a long-term strategic plan exacts a price in the public arena. The board that does not annually measure its progress and convey its policies as a part of a larger design for school and student improvement is frequently the board that finds itself under attack for ineffectiveness from the legislature, the governor’s office, and the public.

Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members

Despite a time of unprecedented change in membership on state boards of education, very little time is spent orienting new board members on their statutory roles and responsibilities. Moreover, many seasoned board members demonstrate a lack of understanding of the role of policymaker in their approach to service on the state board of education. One approach to measuring how well board members understand and execute their roles is an annual evaluation using an instrument that asks board members to:

★ Delineate their roles and responsibilities as board members;
★ Identify and assess individual and board activities addressed within that role;
★ Measure effectiveness and appropriateness of board activities in advancing and achieving the board’s goals; and
★ Identify voids in state leadership that are areas into which the board can move.

By using this approach, the board is better able to confront actions that adversely affect the effectiveness of the institution. Thus, for example, a board member who operates independently in approaching the legislature will better understand why such actions are inappropriate. In all probability the board’s evaluations will reveal that...
independent actions are not the role and responsibility of a single board member, nor do such actions result in moving the board closer to achieving its goals. If the board can determine that only a personal agenda was advanced, the board recognizes that it has organizational and operational dilemmas that the members must address.

**Board Operations**

The competency of individual board members is irrelevant if the board cannot operate in a cohesive and effective manner. Thus, evaluating the board’s operating procedures motivates the board to critically examine its structure and proceedings and to decide if they are actually moving the board toward its desired outcomes. An evaluation of the board’s functions provides a vehicle that measures a board’s efficiency and its adeptness at accommodating the diverse issues it confronts. Some topics that should be included in this portion of an evaluation instrument are:

- Agenda development and administration;
- Policymaking procedures;
- Alignment of the board’s operations with its strategic plan, mission, and goals; and
- Opportunities for board development.

A carefully constructed evaluation instrument solicits from board members their levels of satisfaction with the way issues are brought before the board both as agenda items and as study topics. If the board’s agenda is not aligned with its strategic plan, or if the board meeting is constructed so that important items are not afforded sufficient time for study or debate, a board should make the necessary adjustments to calibrate itself toward better results.

Besides measuring the effectiveness of the overall functions of the board, a good evaluation instrument reveals areas for future board development. Just as learning is a lifelong process, board development should be a continuous practice.

**Progress Toward Achieving Board Goals**

A regular and methodical evaluation of the board’s goals is one of the most critical components of effective boardsmanship. A board should have both long- and short-term goals driven by data that can be aggregated and used to improve the performance of students and the professionals that work with them. The board should approve three to five annual short-term goals that are subsets of their long-term objectives. During its annual evaluation process, the board can measure its satisfaction with the achievement of the goals, as well as the appropriateness of the goals with respect to the board’s mission.

Finally, every board should develop and distribute an annual report that articulates its mission, goals, and objectives. The report should accurately reflect what the board has accomplished over the previous year and how it intends to use what it has learned and accomplished to keep moving forward on behalf of the students in the state.

NASBE can help state boards develop a comprehensive self-evaluation instrument as part of its technical assistance services. Please contact Brenda Welburn at NASBE headquarters for additional information.