

Jefferson County Board of Education Governance Improvement Recommendations

1. Strategic Plan: Goal Progress

It is critical to provide structure to the Board Meeting agenda to help ensure that board discussions are focused on Goal Progress checking to gain understanding and provide oversight for programs effecting student learning. In order to do this, effective boards:

- ✚ Schedule a significant portion of the board meeting to one or two designated Strategic Goals. Do this by adding an agenda item “Strategic Plan: Goal Progress”
- ✚ Ask the staff and/or superintendent to provide data from a variety of types and sources to allow for board members to assess and discuss progress toward the Strategic Goal(s).
- ✚ School board questions and discussion should center on:
 - how programs are leading to improvements or decline in targeted strategic goals,
 - how leaders and staff plan to address areas where strategic goals are not being met,
 - clarification on presented data, and
 - superintendent recommendations on revising programs that do not meet goals.

2. Superintendent Reports

While it is gratifying and necessary to celebrate individual and isolated school and district successes, effective boards ensure that these are limited to approximately 10-15% of the board meeting time. This is not because these recognitions are not important, but because the board members primary responsibility is to use their limited board meeting time to review and discuss Goal Progress checking of district Strategic Goals. In order to do this effective boards:

- ✚ Ensure that Superintendent reports avoid general information and additional recognitions. These recognitions should be included in the recognition portion of the agenda.
- ✚ Ensure that Superintendent reports focus on:
 - presenting data and achievements demonstrating progress toward one or more strategic goals
 - clearly attaching data to one or more strategic goals
 - provide a graphic to show visually how each activity or outcome is attached to Strategic Goals.
 - Include any general elements prescribed by the board like comparisons to benchmarked districts, comparisons by school, comparisons to state results, disaggregation of specified categories, etc...

In general, the Superintendent Report should focus on the achievements that demonstrate movement toward district strategic goals.

3. Staff Member Presentations

- ✚ Presentation data can be prescribed by the board in advance through the use of Balanced Governance Policy Writing Protocols. This calls for the inclusion of the following guidelines within applicable district policy:

- Measureable outcomes identified
- Specific data to be presented to the board
- Frequency and time of data presentation
- Format of data presentation
- Link strategic goal to policy

In this way, a board could indicate that a report on a particular program **MUST** include elements like comparisons to benchmarked districts, comparisons by school, comparisons to state results, disaggregation of specified categories, etc...

- ✚ Develop procedures to ensure that staff presentations meet prescribed criteria. For example, governing policies should be written to include these elements:
 - Presentation information should be sent to board members at least 2 weeks in advance of the scheduled board meeting.
 - The superintendent should review the data to ensure that prescribed criteria are met prior to sending the data to the school board. Items where prescribed data are not prepared should cause the agenda item to be removed and replaced.
 - Upon receipt of the presentation materials, board members should review the information and communicate any changes directly to the superintendent and at least 1 week prior to the board meeting.
- ✚ Presentations might be conducted at the board meeting for the sake of the viewing public. Board member governing policy should indicate that questions and discussion center on
 - asking for details to explain **how** programs are leading to improvements or decline in targeted strategic goals,
 - asking for how staff will address areas where strategic goals have not been met,
 - asking for clarification on presented data, and
 - redirecting the superintendent to bring recommendations on revising programs that do not meet goals.

In general, discussion should focus on the Why and How of program improvement and meeting strategic goals.

4. Board Reports

Most school board members do not provide reports during a board meeting that include the sharing of recognitions or school events attended but focus on sharing “bridging” activities that influence the district and student learning. Typically, a Report time on the agenda is designated for board members to:

- ✚ Share activity with community committees,
- ✚ Share activity in community events,
- ✚ Share activity that acts to increase community/school district bridging and develop and strengthen relationships,
- ✚ Share activity leading to community/district partnerships that could support improving the district’s instructional program for students.

5. Board Committee Service

Board Members typically do not serve on internal working committees. Effective boards:

- ✚ Focus Board Member committee service on external community committees.
- ✚ Organize which board member attends which functions intentionally and strategically. This typically can be done as another component of the Planning Agenda section of the board meeting. This approach:
 - ensures that all critical events are attended by at least one board member.
 - ensures that important or critical events aren’t missed.
 - ensures that important or critical groups are not overlooked or given excessive attention.
- ✚ The assigning of external committee or event service reduces siloing by board members. Siloing is when a board member focuses exclusively on individual groups or schools within the district. This practice:
 - goes against the Balanced Governance characteristic of maintaining a broad advocacy focus.
 - allows the board member to show that they work together as a wholistic team rather than as a collection of directors of individual districts.
 - exclusively representing the needs of only a certain set of schools tends to focus board members on positions rather than interest in the whole district.
- ✚ Internal committee service:
 - wrongly presumes/relies on board member expertise or interest across diverse areas.
 - tends to have a “chilling effect” on staff in program development.
 - biases board members when the program or policy comes to a whole-board vote.
 - allows for inappropriate use of (or the appearance of the use of) individual authority.
 - promotes focus on process management rather than strategic goal achievement in board meetings.

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6. Board Requests

In general, it appears that board members are using the Report Request portion of the agenda to continue to discuss and debate operations and management issues and requests. Effective boards:

- ✚ Do not have a Request section in the agenda. This effectively allows for individual board members and individual special interests to dominate board time that should be spent on discussion regarding goal progress checking on strategic goals and issues of student learning.

If the Request section of the agenda is retained, then board member requests and comments during this portion of the board meeting should adhere to the same governance policies adopted for consent agenda items:

- ✚ If Board members need additional information, it should be requested through the Superintendent outside of the board meeting.
- ✚ Board members are directed to notify the superintendent of Request items that need further clarification or explanation.
- ✚ The board member should meet with the superintendent to receive further information and explanation prior to the board meeting.
- ✚ After receiving this information, any Request Item for which the board member is still in disagreement or desires public deliberation and debate should be forwarded to the Board Chair. This supports the JCBE Operating Principle to “adhere to the practice of ‘no surprises’ for Board members or the Superintendent”.
- ✚ Request items should be added to the agenda of the board meeting as prescribed by the rules for adding agenda items.
- ✚ Board members should avoid requesting operations and management items be added to the agenda for public deliberation. Board member agendas should continue to “focus on advancing student achievement” as indicated in governing policy 1.45.

7. Requesting Reports from Staff

- ✚ Develop governing policies that include the following protocols:
 - If the above recommendations are used, requests for additional data reports should be minimized.

- If Board members need additional information, it should be requested through the Superintendent outside of the board meeting.

Requesting additional data during board meetings can serve as an unintended model to community constituents to end-run the chain-of-command, by-passes the board members interest to go through the superintendent, disallows the superintendent from providing the proper avenue for the information, disallows the superintendent from sharing information with the board member that may make the request unnecessary, adds additional and unsuspected work onto the school personnel, and reinforces a culture of special interest rather than maintaining focus on district strategic goals. In other words, if the information is critical to allow the whole board to check progress on strategic plans or provide oversight, then the information should be provided to the entire board and the topic should be included on a board agenda.

8. Discussing Consent Agenda Items

- ✚ Develop governing policies that include the following protocols:
 - Board members are directed to notify the superintendent of Consent Agenda Items that need further clarification or explanation.
 - The board member should meet with the superintendent to receive further information and explanation prior to the board meeting.
 - After receiving this information, any Consent Agenda Item for which the board member is still in disagreement or desires public deliberation and debate should be forwarded to the Board Chair. This supports the JCBE Operating Principle to “adhere to the practice of ‘no surprises’ for Board members or the Superintendent”.
 - Consent agenda items should be added to the agenda of the board meeting as prescribed by the rules for adding agenda items.
 - Board members should avoid requesting operations and management items be added to the agenda for public deliberation. Board member agendas should continue to “focus on advancing student achievement” as indicated in governing policy 1.45.
- ✚ Board members do not need to review what information they have requested during the regular board meeting. The Board Chair, superintendent, and the requesting board member should meet to resolve concerns raised if:
 - the information is denied,
 - the information has not been provided within a reasonable time,
 - the appropriateness of the request requires further discussion.

Board members should be reminded that special information should generally only be requested if it allows the board member to check progress on strategic plans or provide oversight. If this is the case, then the information should probably be provided to the entire board and the topic should be included on a board agenda through the regular processes.