



# Boards can drive student success through sound policy

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**W**hile state law outlines many of your requirements, several school board policies allow the board the opportunity to clearly define expectations and set standards for students beyond what statute requires.

## **District goals and philosophy**

Boards are required to adopt policies addressing educational philosophy; school district goals and objectives; and instructional goals and objectives. While these policies should be broad enough to allow for flexibility in programs and offerings, they also should be looked at closely to make sure they reflect the district's philosophy and goals.

Consider fleshing out these goals in more detail within your strategic plan and use them as a guide for developing this more regularly reviewed plan. The goals, objectives

and philosophy should be reflected in your programs, so make sure they line up and guide you in the direction you want to go. Consider reviewing your goals, objectives and educational philosophy every three years or anytime your strategic plan is revised and updated.

## **Graduation requirements**

While your district goals include ensuring that students graduate on time and are prepared for college or a career, state law defines the number and type of credits required for a student to earn a high school diploma.

Students are required to complete 20 credits in specific courses as well as meet other criteria established by state law. Graduation requirements have undergone significant changes over the past five years and there are more options now for local criteria for graduation. More information on these



*Board policies on graduation requirements, extracurricular activities and parent and family involvement can positively impact student achievement in the district.*

requirements is available in the Capital Insider Column beginning on page 10. Boards may choose to establish additional graduation criteria, which many districts do through board policy. Some districts may require an additional unit of social studies; others may require students to complete a specific elective, such as a career planning course. Districts also may require students to complete at least one unit of a foreign language or computer class. In addition, districts may, through policy, require students to complete a designated number of community service hours to increase their knowledge and awareness of the world around them and instill in them the importance of volunteerism.

As you review your graduation requirements policy, do so with the end goal in mind and determine if there are additional criteria you want your students to meet to prepare them for success.

### **Extracurricular activities**

Extracurricular activities should be established with specific goals and objectives in mind. For many students, participating in extracurricular activities is what motivates them to stay on track in school. Evaluate your extracurricular activities to ensure they have clearly defined goals and are centered around student success, both on and off the field. Look at them in light of your district philosophy, goals and objectives and see how they measure up.

Boards are required to adopt policies defining interscholastic activity eligibility. State law requires districts to set a minimum GPA for participation and decide whether students may participate if they receive a failing grade in the previous grading period. The established criteria may be what motivates some of your students to be successful in school.

Are you challenging students enough and preparing them to be successful after high school through the academic criteria you have in place? At the same time, are you setting the bar at a reasonable level for students of all levels of academic ability to have the opportunity to participate? For students who may have a more difficult time meeting the academic criteria, consider establishing study tables for teams and clubs where students can receive additional assistance and have dedicated time to work on their studies.

### **Parent and family involvement**

A key part of student success is parent and family involvement. Recognizing this, federal law requires districts to adopt parent and family involvement policies.

The board is required to adopt a board-level parent and family involvement policy that encourages strong home-school partnerships; provides for consistent and effective communication among parents and family members or foster caregivers and school officials; offers parents and family

members or foster caregivers ways to help and encourage their children or foster children to do their best; and offers ways parents and family members or foster caregivers can support classroom learning activities. These areas are explained in detail in district- and school-level policies. Districts also must carry out parent and family involvement activities.

As you establish these more detailed district- and school-level policies and activities, know your community. Remember your obligations to communicate with families in a language they can understand and how this impacts your communications with parents and families for whom English is a second language.

Also, consider the cultural diversity of your community, especially if you plan events involving food. Do you have a large cultural group in the district for which certain foods are restricted? If so, consider having options available for these families to make the activities more inclusive and welcoming for *all* families. Remember that your parent and family policies must be annually evaluated to gauge their effectiveness. Take time to see what is working in engaging your parents and family members and what can be strengthened.

### **And more**

Many policies can impact student achievement. Other examples include ensuring your homeless student policies, procedures and subsequent protocols are current and communicated. Also consider how student fees may impact a student — you may previously have charged a fee for copies of student records to third parties, such as a transcript sent to a college. Could this potentially present a barrier to some students who may not be able to pay these fees? Consider whether waiving these fees in all or some situations may allow students to feel more comfortable asking for these records to take the next step for their future. Also, evaluate your policies on support services, including transportation and food service, to see if they are focused on student success.

### **Where do you go from here?**

As you begin school year, look at your policies in all the areas addressed here to determine whether they reflect the goals you have for your students and your educational program. If not, what changes do you want to make and how do you want to implement them?

Some changes may take time. Changes to graduation requirements need to be implemented with freshmen; changes in athletic GPAs may need to be phased in over time; and the annual evaluation of parent and family involvement policies may require regular changes. Make a review of your student- and educational-focused policies a priority as you strive for student success. ■