



Student Achievement Leadership Team
Resource Kit #7

November 2003

Ohio School Boards Association
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Dear School Board Members, Superintendents and Treasurers:

Since OSBA first adopted a resolution to focus its efforts on improving student achievement in November 1998, much has happened in public education. The Ohio General Assembly passed several pieces of academic reform legislation, then Congress adopted the No Child Left Behind Act. This August, Ohio's House Bill 3 aligned our accountability standards with the federal standards.

In some areas, Ohio was ahead of the accountability/reform movement. In some areas, we were on track. And in some areas, we are behind. Nevertheless, **our students are receiving a better education** than when we started the OSBA Student Achievement Initiative five years ago. **Student achievement is up** in schools throughout the state. We should be proud of our successes, but we can't be complacent; **we still have more work to do to assure that no child is left behind.**

OSBA is reissuing this updated resource kit and asking you to take action to reestablish a focus improving student achievement in your school district. **At the beginning of the new year, OSBA is asking every board of education to rededicate their efforts to improving student results.** This tool kit is designed to help you get started.

I am really excited about this program! We are — and have been — making a difference in the lives of Ohio children. If every OSBA member board takes part, two important things will happen.

First, **together we will continue to make a difference in student outcomes.** As school board members, we make decisions that affect programs and allocate resources in a manner that improves test scores, keeps kids in school and better prepares all our students for the worlds of work and higher education. We have actually changed the statistics and must continue to do so.

The second thing we can accomplish is to show the media and the public that **we are focused on student results, not just funding or football or taxes.** We can demonstrate that many good things are going on in the schools and we are working to do even more.

This tool kit **asks you to get involved.** It contains sample resolutions, media materials and helpful hints about working with your community. **The kit should be useful** whether your district is large or small, urban or rural, wealthy or poor.

The OSBA Student Achievement Initiative's **goal is to make improved student achievement an ongoing and visible part of the work of every school board in Ohio.** We can do it!

Larry E. Holdren
OSBA president
member of the Washington County ESC
and Washington County JVS boards

serving the public school leadership team

Your assignment

To focus on student achievement:

December

- * review this *Resource Kit*;
- * discuss potential activities with members of your district management team.

January

- * during your board of education organizational meeting, include the student achievement resolution (*sample on page 4*) on the board agenda and adopt it;
- * take the OSBA Student Achievement pledge (*below*);
- * appoint a board member as your student achievement liaison to be responsible for your student achievement initiative (*job description on page 5*);
- * send media release (*sample on page 6*);
- * discuss how to regularly incorporate student achievement into board agenda, giving it a priority position;
- * begin identifying community leaders for a community advisory committee (*see page 7*).

February

- * name community advisory committee members and conduct first meeting;
- * use district achievement inventory during advisory committee meeting (*see page 9*).

March

- * plan activities to highlight district student achievements throughout the spring.

April-May

- * conduct activities to highlight district student achievements.

July

- * plan your strategy for the August release of the school district report cards.

OSBA Student Achievement pledge

I pledge to make improving student achievement my top priority.

Before making any decision for my school district, I will always ask, "How will this benefit my students?"

I further promise to promote the achievement of high standards for students, staff and board members and I will do all in my power to help them meet those standards.

August

- * plan activities to highlight district student achievements during American Education Week (www.nea.org/aew).

November

- * celebrate American Education Week (Nov. 8–12, 2004);
- * attend Student Achievement Fair at OSBA Capital Conference (Nov. 9, 2004).

OSBA Student Achievement Initiative resolution

*Adopted by the Ohio School Boards Association Delegate Assembly
November 9, 1998*

WHEREAS, school board members throughout Ohio are deeply committed to having students achieve at their highest potential; and

WHEREAS, no work of boards of education is more important than improving student achievement; and

WHEREAS, the membership of the Ohio School Boards Association expects their Association to support and assist school boards in this critical effort; and

WHEREAS, school boards are being held to an increasingly high level of accountability for student results; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Ohio School Boards Association shall create, staff and support a Student Achievement Initiative to encourage and assist school boards to focus on improving student achievement; and be it further

RESOLVED, that OSBA shall call on all school boards in Ohio to officially declare their intent to make improvement of student achievement the standard by which all local decisions are judged; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the OSBA president shall appoint a Student Achievement Leadership Team, composed of school board members who will provide guidance to the Student Achievement Initiative; and be it further

RESOLVED, that OSBA's support of school boards in this effort shall include:

- distribution of an OSBA Student Achievement Resource Kit to every member;*
- distribution of information and ideas to assist efforts by local boards;*
- seeking the endorsement and cooperation of other organizations and individuals;*
- training programs for school board members on how they can take effective steps in their community; and*
- encouragement of community participation in programs to help students improve academic results.*

Sample Student Achievement Initiative resolution for your district

WHEREAS, we, the members of the _____ Board of Education, join fellow school board members throughout Ohio with our deep commitment to having students achieve at their highest potential; and

WHEREAS, no work of our board of education is more important than improving student achievement; and

WHEREAS, school boards are being held to an increasingly high level of accountability for student results;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the _____ Board of Education shall create a vision to refocus on improving student achievement; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the _____ Board of Education in cooperation with staff, parents and the community shall rededicate itself to establishing a successful learning environment for our students; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the _____ Board of Education exercise its authority to demand accountability for increased student achievement; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the _____ Board of Education encourages all members of our community to participate in programs to help students improve academic results.

January ____, 2004
Adoption date

(signed) board president

(signed) board vice president

(signed) board member

(signed) board member

(signed) board member

(signed) board member

(signed) board member

Customize this resolution to fit your own district's situation.

Student achievement liaison job description

Each of Ohio's public school boards should appoint one member, at the January organizational meeting, to serve as their district's student achievement liaison. (Each school district should inform OSBA of the appointment, as soon as possible. This appointment should be reflected on the OSBA roster form.) The student achievement liaisons are a vital part of OSBA's Student Achievement Initiative as the links between individual school boards and the Student Achievement Leadership Team (SALT). Each student achievement liaison has four main objectives:

1. To share, at least on a monthly basis, information about ways to improve student achievement with their fellow board members;
2. To encourage their school board colleagues to focus on improving student achievement;
3. To establish and maintain relationships with their academic booster groups and;
4. To participate in SALT activities, and to encourage other board members to do so as well. There are several SALT events during Capital Conference and usually one free workshop in the spring.

Furthermore, each student achievement liaison will receive *Success*, OSBA's monthly SALT newsletter. *Success* is distributed only to student achievement liaisons and liaisons are encouraged to share the information with fellow board members and administrative staff.

Sample news release

(RETYPE ON DISTRICT LETTERHEAD AND FILL IN THE BLANKS
for a list of media in your area visit OSBA's Web site, www.osba-ohio.org)

FOR RELEASE DATE.

For more information, contact:

DISTRICT CONTACT

TITLE

() _____ - _____

Local board pledges to make student achievement top priority

YOUR TOWN—Today, members of the _____ Board of Education pledged to make improving student achievement their top priority. During the board's meeting, board president _____ led the school board members, superintendent, treasurer and other district administrators in a recitation of the Ohio School Boards Association's Student Achievement Pledge.

"Student achievement has always been our goal. We want to refocus as much energy, excitement and intensity as possible at increasing our students' achievement," said (BOARD PRESIDENT'S LAST NAME). "The motivation of every school board member and educator I know is helping students do better in the classroom and, in turn, in life."

In November 1998, the OSBA Delegate Assembly adopted a resolution creating the OSBA Student Achievement Initiative. The resolution created an ongoing program focused on the board members' roles and responsibilities in public education and marshaling the members' support to increase student achievement.

The association has developed a number of programs to help school boards improve student achievement. OSBA President Larry Holdren, a member of the Washington County Educational Service Center Governing Board and Washington County Joint Vocational School District Board of Education said, "We want our number one priority to be helping students do better in school. If we publicly and actively state that student achievement is our focus, we can create serious momentum. We can make a big difference in the lives of Ohio's children."

LIST SOME INITIATIVES TO INCREASE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN YOUR DISTRICT.

Listening to your community

Giving community members ownership of their public schools pays big dividends, because most people value and take care of the things they own. When we listen to community members, involve them in critical decisions and value their opinions, we build trust and ownership in public schools. School board members who regularly listen to the people in their communities gain respect from constituents.

The key to success is listening, not telling.

Plan for and get input early in the decision process

✱ The first step in determining how to get input from the community on student achievement is to analyze who will be affected by the decision and how you can gather information and opinions from those people. To get information from people throughout the community, you can:

- ✓ form a committee or task force;
- ✓ informally listen to comments from a wide range of community members;
- ✓ conduct a formal survey designed to gather an accurate assessment of community members' attitudes.

Forming a student achievement advisory committee

- ✱ Analyze the make up of your community and what groups should be represented on the committee. Be sure to reflect the diversity that exists in the community and that all groups are represented.
- ✱ Include equal numbers of people from both ends of the opinion spectrum. They will balance each other, give credence to your willingness to listen to all opinions.
- ✱ Avoid repeatedly appointing the same people to committees. Although it is important to have

committee members who have constituencies and to expect them to get input from those constituencies, look for people who have not recently served on a district committee.

✱ Keep the membership of the committee to a manageable size, probably fewer than 15 members. If a larger committee cannot be avoided, plan for ways to divide the committee into smaller groups to complete its work.

✱ Write a clear “charge” or “job description” for the group that outlines its assigned task; the time line for work to be completed; to whom the committee reports; who will facilitate the meetings; if there is funding and how much; what will happen to the recommendations of the group; etc. (see next page).

✱ Decide if you want one recommendation, several prioritized recommendations or several possible solutions from the group.

✱ Assign staff to provide information and other support needed by the committee.

✱ If appropriate, ask for periodic reports from the group.

✱ If the group is appointed by the board, invite the members to a board meeting to present its final report.

✱ Take time to consider the report before making a decision.

✱ Explain the rationale for your final decision.

If the committee truly represented all of those who are affected by the decision, the chances are very good the committee's recommendation will be the best course of action for your community and its schools. If the final decision does not conform with the committee's recommendation, invite the committee members to a meeting to explain why the decision differed from their recommendation.

✱ Thank your student achievement advisory committee members for their service.

Adapted from an OSBA Communication**Plus** tipsheet by Gay Campbell, APR, communications consultant

District student achievement committee form

Sample outline form

Date charge was developed: _____

Name of committee: _____

Reason(s) for forming this committee: _____

Charge to the committee: (including specific jobs, evaluation components) _____

Accountability of committee: _____

Time line for committee's work: _____

Membership: _____

Funding source/budget information: _____

Convener: _____

How the results of the committee's work will be used: _____

Form completed by _____ on _____

District student achievement inventory

Use this list with your community groups to discuss how you want to measure student achievement and take action to improve it.

1. What is the percentage of students passing the proficiency/achievement test?
2. Are students attending classes? Is classtime uninterrupted? Are students able to work in blocks of time on tasks?
3. Are teachers encouraging different learning styles? Is that reflected in the different types of work that students are producing?
4. Are lesson plans being targeted to the different learning styles? Are administrators evaluating teachers to include learning style planning?
5. Does the district have programs for children at risk?
 - * English as second language,
 - * homeless kids,
 - * neglected and abused kids.
6. Are children with special abilities encouraged to go beyond the curriculum by the following:
 - * extra credit,
 - * special projects,
 - * peer learning,
 - * internships.
7. Do parents have accurate, timely feedback about their children's performance?
 - * interims,
 - * parent conferences (encouraging parents to come and schedule for times parents can attend),
 - * follow-up is done to contact those parents who miss the conference,
 - * ad hoc conferences.
8. What academic intervention programs do you have in place — to catch students early on?
 - * Are parents involved in the intervention process?
 - * Do parents work with students on their homework?
 - * Are teachers involving parents in the homework process?
9. Is there a teacher mentoring program (young teachers by veterans)? Does this include peer teaching partnerships?
10. Does the board have co-curriculars to learn or that go hand-in-hand with the curriculum, such as field trips, fairs and projects, academic clubs and student publications (school-sponsored)?
11. Are staff expanding the curriculum to include projects or assignments that parents and students can do outside of the classroom to improve student performance?
12. Is the administration working on developing a continuous improvement plan? Are other segments of the community involved besides parents (seniors, young professionals as volunteers)?
13. Is there tutoring for children on proficiency/achievement subjects?
14. Is the district using grant money? Is an administrator overseeing the grant process, and does the district have data on current grant eligibility?
15. How many students participate in post secondary options?
16. Are there enrichment opportunities for all students to go into greater depth in a particular subject area?
17. Is the district using technology to connect students to Internet libraries and additional research materials?
18. Does the physical condition of district facilities provide an environment conducive to learning?
 - * electrical hookups in each classroom and study area,
 - * heating and cooling maintained at comfortable levels,
 - * clean buildings free from graffiti,
 - * well lit, bright environment,
 - * students' work is on display in halls and classrooms.
19. Is there an academic booster group for the district? By each building/grade level?

The role of the local school board in improving student achievement

The public expects the nation's schools to provide a learning environment conducive to student achievement at the highest levels. It is the fundamental role of local school boards to provide the leadership necessary to create that learning environment. To provide such leadership, local school boards must first establish student achievement as their highest priority.

Historically, local school boards, as lay governors of the school system, believed that their role was not to substitute their own views on matters of pedagogy for those of professional educators. Rather, they perceived their role to be supportive in nature, approving the budget, placing their stamp on legal documents, dealing with constituents, receiving reports, campaigning for bond issues, and providing “cover” on politically sensitive issues.

Although all of these school board functions

are legitimate and should continue, the challenges of raising student achievement in the 21st century suggest a very dear and overarching governance role for local school boards in setting education policy. It is a role that does not cross into the implementation of educational content or pedagogy, but that provides leadership to school systems as they establish and achieve high levels of performance among their students.

While many school districts today are immersed in standard setting, reading-improvement strategies, or other specific components of student achievement, many have not yet addressed the issue in its entirety. The purpose of this section is to help local school boards raise their specific goals and strategies to a new level of thinking by focusing on the “whole” of student achievement for all children.

The four pillars of the local school board role

To advance student achievement, local school boards can structure their work into four broad and interrelated categories:

- ✱ vision setting;
- ✱ establishing a successful learning environment;
- ✱ exercising accountability for results;
- ✱ using advocacy to build support.

Each is a necessary component of successful school board leadership. School boards should review their current activities in each area, consider what more could be done, and evaluate how these four basic functions can be more effectively linked to each other to produce a well-designed action plan.

Vision setting for student achievement

Local school boards should play the central role in driving and guiding the process to establish a vision of education for their school systems. Indeed, as representatives of the community and governors of the school system,

school boards are the best catalysts for stimulating the dialogue, consensus, and actions that can shape a truly dynamic and responsive student achievement plan. Local school boards should play the central role in driving and guiding the process to establish a vision of education for their school systems.

Successful vision setting will involve several steps, such as establishing school district goals, developing indicators of success and drawing comparisons to the current system. The process also must bring all parties — parents, the business community, the media, and the community at large, together with administrators, teachers (and unions), and the school board — into a common dialogue about the future of their school system.

Establishing a student achievement environment

To be successful, the vision must be

supported by an operational plan that:

- * provides the necessary programs and resources;
- * promotes the understanding, commitment, and accountability of all parties;
- * devotes the time and energy that is needed at all levels within the system.

The superintendent, as chief executive officer of the school district, establishes the operating environment. Compatibility between the superintendent and the district's specific student achievement vision should be at the forefront of his or her hiring and evaluation. At the time, the school board must provide sufficient resources and flexibility to create an environment which allows the superintendent to focus on bringing the vision to fruition.

Beyond providing the financial resources, the school board must take the lead in creating an environment for student learning in other key ways. It should make student achievement a significant part of its regular meeting agenda, pursue it in board committee work, and advocate throughout the community. A successful school board must operate as a coherent team, with clear strategies and goals in mind.

Accountability for student achievement

In establishing accountability measures, the school board and staff must determine the way success and failure will be assessed, the content and timing of reports, the system of rewards and consequences, and the method for reporting goals, results, and other information to individual parents and to the public at large.

Most important, the school system must hold itself accountable for the implementation of the student achievement plan and, ultimately, for student success. An accountability process must detail the contributions expected of the superintendent, teachers, principals, and the board itself. It also should ensure that the vision, plan, and specific expectations for student achievement are communicated to staff members as early as possible and made a part of their own formal evaluation process.

Finally, a student achievement plan also must hold students accountable for their own performance. Students must know how good is good enough, how success will be measured, and what positive and negative consequences (such as special recognition for excellence or limits on participation in extracurricular activities for failure) the school system has in place. The responsibilities of parents as partners in the educational process also need to be constructively and informatively communicated.

Advocacy for student achievement

Meeting student achievement goals will require the understanding, involvement, and support of the local community and of state and federal policymakers. The local school board must be a vocal advocate for its student achievement vision to each of these audiences.

Because more than 70% of households do not have children in public school, the school district needs to communicate its vision and student achievement goals very clearly to taxpayers and the community as a whole to ensure their support. Without this information, the public's perspective and support can be skewed by the anecdotes and advocacy of others who themselves may not have the entire picture. By contrast, comprehensive information from the school district is likely both to increase support for school budgets and to improve the chances of attracting the involvement of businesses and others in school activities.

State and federal lawmakers and other policymakers also need to know the school district's goals and how they can help support them. State legislators, state board of education members, the state superintendent, and the governor, as well as members of the U.S. Congress, have the power to shape the direction of school systems. Therefore, these policymakers should be encouraged to focus their energy on supporting the school system's vision and plan rather than working at cross purposes to it or in ignorance of it.

The power of the question

Focusing the school system on student achievement issues and strategies is one of the most important functions of a local school board, and board members often can accomplish this task simply by asking the right questions. The following sections suggest several questions school boards can pose to the superintendent and staff in such key areas as standard setting, testing, and resource alignment.

Setting high standards: measuring academic results

As previously noted, content standards identify what children need to know and do, and performance standards identify the level of proficiency that students are expected to reach. Virtually all states set these standards for school systems and use a variety of mechanisms to obtain compliance, including mandating standardized testing and requiring students to take certain courses to earn a diploma. While local school districts must adhere to minimum state standards, they are not precluded from requiring students to perform at even higher levels than those set by the state.

It is important that parents, the school board, and staff, at appropriate levels, know what the standards are and what the tests measure. The school district should ensure that tests accurately measure standards in order to avoid expensive and potentially disruptive program changes based on invalid test results. Here are some questions local school boards should ask about standards and tests:

1. Do we want the state's standards to be the "all" or the "core" of our school system's standards? How much better do we want our students to perform than the state requires? What else do we want them to know and do?
2. How well do our teachers know our school district's standards and the level of instruction that is needed to reach them? How clearly are standards being communicated to parents and the community? Do parents know ways they can help their child reach the standards?

3. Which tests do we use to measure student achievement? What are they designed to tell us? Can the results be misinterpreted and, if so, how?

4. Do the tests we use emphasize skills in memorization, analysis, application, communication, etc., in a balance that reflects the school district's concept of student achievement?

5. In addition to any state test that is required, are there any other tests that we want to use?

6. How vigorous are the tests and standards that we use? For example, while our students may perform well on Ohio's test for language skills, do we know how well the state as a whole performs on a national test such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)? If Ohio's children perform significantly better on the state test than on NAEP, do we need to re-examine our state test and standards?

7. How does our school district want to benchmark test results? For example, do we want to compare ourselves with the state as a whole, with neighboring school districts, with school districts that resemble our demographic and socioeconomic profile, with our performance in previous years, with our vision or goals, or with the percentage of our students that move up or down from one category of proficiency to another in a given year?

8. What performance standards and expectations do we set for children with special needs? Do we provide special support so that they can maximize their level of performance?

9. What kinds of rewards and remedies are there for students and staff for exceptionally good or bad results?

10. How well do parents and community members understand test results? Are specific areas of a student's strengths and weaknesses clearly identified and defined?

Other student achievement indicators

In addition to performance on standardized tests, are there other indicators of student achievement that our school district should use? If we use other indicators, how do we

determine whether our efforts are successful? To a great extent, the selection of these indicators will define the character and values that distinguish local communities from each other and are at the heart of local governance of the schools.

The following questions demonstrate the broad range of indicators by which school districts can measure goals and success beyond performance on standardized academic tests:

1. What percentage of our students graduate? What percentage graduate with the state's highest academic diploma?
2. What percentage of our students plan to enroll in two-year and four-year colleges immediately after graduation?
3. What does the business community think of the competency of our recent graduates? How can we find out if we don't know?
4. What percentage of our students take Advanced Placement courses? What percentage take three or four years of mathematics and science (rather than business mathematics and general science)? What percentage take three or more years of foreign language?
5. Are greater numbers of women, minorities, or other subgroups who have been historically underrepresented in higher-level mathematics and science courses now taking these courses?
6. What percentage of our students are engaged in positive (e.g., volunteer) activities in the community?
7. Have we adequately reduced violence and drug abuse?
8. Finally, are our students prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century — not just in an academic sense, but also in terms of the technological, organizational, and sociocultural demands of the next century?

Resource alignment for student achievement

As previously discussed, tests must accurately reflect the standards that are set, or a school system will not know how well its students are meeting those standards and will

not have a valid basis for making program changes.

But even when standards and tests are properly aligned with each other, the system's resources and programs must also be adequately designed to support the standards. Not even top school districts are likely to meet all the tested standards if their programs highlight skills and knowledge which differ significantly from those that the standards emphasize.

Resource alignment issues such as these are addressed in the following broad questions and in the ensuing discussion, which examines the specific areas of teacher qualifications, curriculum development, and textbook selection:

1. Does our school district have the range of programs in place and the quality of programming needed to reach our student achievement goals? (Students cannot take advanced placement courses, for example, if they are not offered.)
2. Do we have the quality and adequacy of special support programs (teen pregnancy prevention programs, for example) needed to help students stay in school?
3. Does our school district have current information about innovations and best practices across the state or country in such areas as whole-school reform or the use of technology in raising student achievement?
4. If a particular school is not adequately meeting our school system's standards, what do we do about it? Are there any formal processes in place to help that school improve?
5. Do we set high expectations for all children? In supporting children to reach those expectations, do we accommodate different learning needs, as well as the special needs of individual students and our culturally diverse student body?

Aligning teachers with high standards

The quality of the teaching force is at the core of student achievement. In a paper

prepared for the National Goals Panel, “*Teaching for high standards: What policy makers need to know and be able to do,*” Columbia University education professor Linda Darling-Hammond reviewed a number of studies which suggest that teacher qualifications (as measured by education, experience, and licensing exam scores) exert an important influence on student achievement. However, several of these studies employed data aggregated to the district level, making it difficult to establish the precise relationship between teacher expertise and achievement at the individual level.

Darling-Hammond also cites data from 1990–91 to demonstrate that too many new teachers are hired with emergency licenses (25%), and, especially at the high school level, too many do not even have a college minor in their field of instruction (23%). More than half of high school students taking physical science are taught by out-of-field teachers (56%), as are nearly two-fifths of those taking life science (39%), and roughly a quarter of those taking mathematics (27%). Further, the least qualified teachers tend to teach in schools with the highest poverty/minority enrollments. She also raises concerns over the adequacy of schools of education in preparing new teachers and the professional development opportunities available to current teachers.

While these broad observations will apply to school districts differently, they provide a useful context for asking the questions set forth below:

- 1.** By subject area and grade level, what percentage of our teachers are qualified (through certification, license, or college major) to teach in their field of instruction? What is the variation in this percentage by school building, and why? What percentage of our new teachers hold substandard or provisional licenses?
- 2.** Do our teachers possess a variety of effective pedagogical skills in their subject area so that they have the skills to accommodate different student learning needs?
- 3.** How do our teachers’ qualifications compare

with those of teachers in similar local school systems or in school systems that we would like to emulate?

- 4.** Do we assign our new teachers or our best teachers to the most challenging students and to the most challenging schools?
- 5.** How closely are professional development opportunities and compensation rewards tied to the teacher’s subject area?
- 6.** Do teachers know the standards expected in our local school system?
- 7.** Can teachers access the information they need? Do they know how to use new technologies in an educationally effective manner?
- 8.** To raise the quality of teaching in our school system, what actions do the school system and the school board need to take? How long will these actions take? How much will they cost? How will our collective bargaining contract have to change?
- 9.** Beyond workshops, what kind of professional development opportunities are available to our teachers (e.g., professional networks, mentoring programs, in-school group activities)? Do we have adequate resources for professional development? Do professional development activities focus on alignment issues and best practices?
- 10.** Do our teachers have adequate time and resources to design curriculum and plan lessons?
- 11.** What mechanisms, such as classroom observation, do we have to determine whether teachers are teaching to the standard that is held for students? (That standard might include teaching broader concepts, such as real-world applications in mathematics and science.)

Aligning curriculum with high standards

Aligning curriculum with the school district’s academic standards and other indicators of success is critical to attain the system’s vision for student achievement. School boards can ask a variety of questions to ensure that the school system’s curriculum and curriculum

development are effective:

1. Has our school district adjusted its curriculum to reflect new state standards, as well as the school system's own standards?
2. Are there areas in which state standards are impinging upon our local flexibility to determine curriculum?
3. Do our school district and the state have adequate numbers of competent personnel to assist local curriculum development?
4. What support systems exist to align classroom teaching and curriculum with curriculum frameworks? Do our teachers have access to subject knowledge and models for effective teaching?
5. Do we know what our teachers need to know to teach to standards? How well are states and state universities preparing new teachers for changes in school curriculum?

Aligning textbooks with high standards

Textbooks and other instructional materials should be the “meat and potatoes” for bringing standards into the classroom. Yet textbooks in many subject areas often are not substantive, do not explain their subjects thoroughly, and frequently do not articulate well with related subjects and other grade levels of instruction.

Many observers have offered numerous criticisms of textbooks, particularly those in mathematics and science. In a paper prepared for the National Education Goals Panel, George D. Nelson of the American Association for the Advancement of Science contends that science and mathematics textbooks (and curriculum generally) are a “mile wide and an inch deep,” do not adequately treat specific subject matter, and too frequently emphasize memorization over understanding.

Other observers, such as education writer Harriet Tyson, also raise the concern that publishers “dumbed down” their texts and went overboard covering too broad a range of subject matter in order to be “marketable” to as diverse a range of school districts as possible. Certain textbooks may be selected without

adequate review or because they come with a teacher instructional guide, even though other, higher quality textbooks, may be available.

These observations may not apply equally to all school systems, but they do suggest a series of questions that can help determine whether or not textbooks and the selection process support increased student achievement:

1. Are our district's textbooks aligned with the subject matter and the level of performance that we want our children to achieve?
2. Do our textbooks provide appropriate treatment of specific subject matter to promote student understanding and acquisition of knowledge? Do they incorporate and expedite best practices?
3. What is the formal process for textbook selection in our school district?
4. Do the people responsible for textbook selection have adequate training and time to do the job?
5. To what extent are better textbooks rejected because of the attraction of bonuses (such as videos and instructional guides) that accompany the sale of other textbooks?
6. What external sources do we use to help review textbooks? Do these external reviews evaluate a textbook based on the quality of content? Or, are these reviews based on such factors as the number of times a subject is mentioned (regardless of context or the meaning conveyed) in order to demonstrate that the text is covering terms used in the state's standards and curriculum frameworks?

The mega questions

Through the “Power of the Question,” local school boards can learn the key issues to raise and can provide the leadership necessary to elevate student achievement.

Now, with these substantive questions in mind, there are a few broader questions that can provide a context for evaluating a school system's student achievement effort and help each board initiate a plan of action:

1. How does our school system define student

achievement?

2. Does our school system have a vision and a plan for raising the achievement of all children?

3. Are our student achievement goals, plans and progress reports set forth in clear and quantifiable terms and broadly disseminated within the school system to parents and to the general public?

4. Are our teachers, administrators, and other staff committed to, and held accountable for, achieving the goals and standards of our school system?

5. How do we involve parents, the business community, and other members of the public in the development and implementation of, and the accountability for, our student achievement goals?

6. What next steps can our school board take to lead the effort to raise student achievement in our school system?

7. Finally, are our students prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century — not just in an academic sense, but also in terms of the technological, organizational, and sociocultural demands of the next century?

Public engagement and community outreach

It is at the community level that the American public can have the greatest impact on education. And it is at their own community level where citizens most want the schools to succeed.

To that end, local businesses frequently support schools by contributing equipment and supplies and by offering workstudy or other incentive programs to keep students in school. Civic and religious groups also work with schools to help develop character, provide support programs, and create positive influences that undergird the education of the whole child. Similarly, news media that understand the vision and direction of the school system can play a very important role in building and attracting community support. Most important, many school boards recognize the vital role parents play in the education of their children and have encouraged them to

take an active part in schools and in developing learning partnerships.

At its most basic level, public engagement can mean a project to inform the public about the school system or a public relations effort to create a positive climate for school initiatives. It also may involve dialogue among diverse community groups to listen to the public's perception of the school system and its goals for the future. But taken to its fullest, public engagement means convening the community for the purpose of developing a common vision from which the school system can develop a student achievement plan—and gain community support for its implementation.

Public engagement can be built around a single issue. Ultimately, however, public engagement should be built around the school system's entire student achievement program for all students. (One good example of this more comprehensive approach is the Cincinnati City Schools' strategic plan, described on NSBA's Web site: www.nsba.org)

To be effective, the school board should build its public engagement program with the four pillars of the school board role in mind (vision setting, the provision of a high-quality learning environment, proper accountability, and community advocacy). The board needs to plan the various steps carefully, because process is vitally important in getting results. Before engaging the community; school system representatives at all levels (the school board, administrators, and teachers) should understand the process and develop a consensus about the most effective approach. For example, the use of small focus groups may be a better way to begin engaging the public than a mass meeting, where people may not fully understand what is expected of them.

Taking the steps out of sequence may hinder results. For example, simply calling the community into an initial vision-setting meeting may result in a low turnout or a meeting which draws only well-known activists but no new blood or broadened community

perspective. If school system representatives outnumber the community, they may inhibit dialogue or turn the meeting into a “school system tells all” event. They may spend too much time and use too much jargon defending the current system rather than listening.

Boards may want to consider using an experienced outside facilitator to develop and manage their public engagement process. The state school boards association may have a public engagement service and should be a good source of ideas.

To help evaluate their current public engagement activities, local school boards can ask the following questions:

- 1.** Is the community involved in telling us its viewpoint about our school system, its needs, and expectations? Does the process really involve communication with a broad range of constituents?
- 2.** Is the community involved in establishing the vision and goals for the school district?
- 3.** Is the community informed of the system’s vision, success, failures, and plans for improvement?
- 4.** Do our staff and community understand the vision and goals of the school system?
- 5.** Do we report test results and other information relating to our indicators of success to parents, the business community, the media, etc.? Do our reports promote understanding, or do they lead to inaccurate conclusions? How do we know?
- 6.** When we report to the public, do we present our goals and results in clear quantifiable terms (e.g., in three years we want 95% of our fifth-grade students to meet state standards for reading)?
- 7.** What efforts do we make to actively communicate with special groups and target audiences to address the six engagement activities outlined above?

School board engagement also means

involvement at the state level and with other entities that influence or can be a resource in raising local student achievement. Local school boards may want to ask several questions to determine whether the school system is “ahead of the curve” in developing student achievement policies and innovations that incorporate and support best practices:

- 1.** To what extent is our school system initiating or responding to proposals at the state level to change standards or assessments, textbook selection, course requirements, or professional qualifications? Do we want to?
- 2.** What kinds of state technical assistance or grant opportunities are available to help support our student achievement plan?
- 3.** To what extent do we use the standards set by national professional associations (e.g., the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics)? Do we want to?
- 4.** Does our school district have adequate outreach to various governmental and quasi-governmental agencies, as well as to education associations, to keep abreast of current developments, trends, and practices in student achievement?
- 5.** Do our school board members and staff have adequate opportunities to sharpen their student achievement strategies through conferences and publications?

Creating and implementing a plan based on community involvement are important elements in defining a vision and establishing a climate that is conducive to learning. By asking the right questions, such as those that have been presented here, school boards can keep their districts constantly focused on the student achievement agenda.

For more information on how other districts improve student achievement, visit OSBA’s Web site at www.osba-ohio.org/SpeakUp.html.

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Questions and answers on student achievement and the law

As you consider student achievement, remember that school boards are creations of the law. Sometimes the law empowers and sometimes it restricts. Does Ohio law address student achievement? Yes. How does it empower or restrict boards in the area of student achievement? The following dialogue will answer some of the many fundamental questions that may arise as you focus on student achievement.

1. One of the basic components of student achievement is the subject matter we're asking students to master. Does Ohio law address curriculum?

Yes it does. Section 3313.60 of the Ohio Revised Code (RC) requires city, exempted village and educational service center boards to adopt a curriculum which must include the following subjects: reading, writing, spelling, oral and written English, literature, geography, U.S. and Ohio history, state, national, and local government, math, natural science, health education, physical education, fine arts, and first aid. Curriculum content is elaborated upon in a series of regulations promulgated by the State Board of Education (*Chapter 3301-35 of the Ohio Administrative Code*).

2. Can a board of education include in its curriculum other subjects in addition to those required by Ohio law?

Yes, definitely!

3. What about the texts students will study, who selects the texts?

Boards select textbooks from a list approved by the state superintendent of public instruction. ESC boards approve the textbook lists for local boards to select from.

4. Do boards have any leeway in determining the school year, when students will attend school?

Yes, some. Ohio laws (*RC 3313.48 and 3317.01*) require the minimum school year to consist of 182 days, including two days for professional meetings and four 1/2 days for parent-teacher conferences. Boards have the prerogative to expand the school year beyond the statutory minimum. (Note that there may be an obligation to engage in collective bargaining on this issue prior to modifying the school year.)

5. Does Ohio law specify the required number of hours in a school day?

Yes, but as with many of these other topics, the law sets minimums. RC 3313.48 generally provides that in grades seven through 12, the school day must consist of not less than five clock hours with pupils in attendance. In grades one through six, the statute sets the minimum duration at five hours, which can include two 15-minute recess periods. Because these are statutory minimums, a board has the option of lengthening the school day in its district.

6. Does the law set the hours of attendance for kindergarten?

Yes. A State Board regulation (*Ohio Administrative Code Rule 3301-35-06(C)*) provides that students in kindergarten shall be offered at least two and a half hours of classes, supervised activities or approved educational options, including a lunch period, per day. A separate statute (*RC 3321.05*) permits boards to offer all-day kindergarten (five clock hours with two recesses, five days per week) or all-day kindergarten extended (six clock hours with two recesses, five days per week).

7. Does Ohio law address the academic performance of students?

Traditionally, the evaluation of students' academic work had been left to the sound discretion of boards and their professional educators. With the enactment of Senate Bill 55 of the 122nd General Assembly, the legislature has entered this province as well.

The law (*RC 3313.609*) requires boards to adopt a grade level promotion and retention policy. The policy must provide that a student who has been truant on ten percent or more of required attendance days and who has failed two or more required courses at his or her grade level, will be retained in his or her current grade level. The statute does leave some discretion in the hands of the principal and teachers of these students. If the principal and teachers agree, a student who otherwise would be held back can be promoted if the principal and teachers agree that the student is academically prepared for the next grade level. School boards have the prerogative to define for their district what "academically prepared" means in this context.

8. Are there other instances in which Ohio law requires a student not be promoted to the next grade level?

Yes. Beginning with students who enter third grade in the school year that starts July 1, 2003, any student who receives a limited score on the reading achievement test cannot be promoted to third grade unless the building principal and the reading teacher agree that the student is academically prepared for the fourth grade. The definition of "academically prepared" is determined by local board policy.

9. What assistance can schools provide to children facing the Third Grade Guarantee?

Intervention is required by *RC 3313.608(B)*. The law requires that schools assess students' reading skills at the end of the first and second grades. Intervention is required for those

reading below grade-level. Moreover, if a student fails to achieve a proficient score on the third-grade reading achievement test by the end of third grade, the district must provide summer remediation. Other options for students who receive a limited-proficient score on the third-grade reading achievement test. Those options are: promotion to the next grade if the principal and reading teacher agree that other evaluations of the student's work indicate that the student is academically prepared for the next grade, promotion to the next grade with "intensive intervention" and retention in the current grade.

10. Are there any other legal provisions concerning the promotion of students from one grade to the next?

Yes. By statute (*RC 3319.01*), the superintendent has the authority to determine the proper grade level to which a student will be assigned. (Some of the provisions of Senate Bill 55, described above, have impacted the superintendent's authority to assign students in some particular circumstances.)

The State Board has the statutory authority to set minimum promotion requirements (*RC 3301.07(D)*) and has promulgated regulations establishing a course of study for public schools in Ohio. As is the case with many of the legal provisions we've discussed, a board of education has the option to exceed the minimums for promotion established by the State Board.

11. Do achievement test results play a role in promotion?

Yes, they can. School districts may use a student's failure to attain at least a basic score on any achievement test as a factor in retaining that student in his or her current grade level. School districts may not use any student's failure to attain a specified score on any achievement test as a factor in any decision to deny the student promotion to the next grade level.

12. Does the law contain any provisions concerning graduation requirements?

Yes, and once again, the law establishes minimums which a board can choose to exceed.

Under Ohio law, a student must earn at least a total of 20 units of credit in the following subjects:

English language arts	4 units
Mathematics	3 units
Social Studies	3 units (<i>including at least 1/2 unit of American History and 1/2 unit of American Government</i>)
Science	3 units (<i>including one unit of biological sciences and one unit of physical sciences</i>)
Health	1/2 unit
Physical Education	1/2 unit
Electives	6 units (<i>including one unit or two 1/2 units in business/technology, fine arts, and/or a foreign language</i>)

The statute (RC 3313.603) also states that high schools may permit students below the ninth grade to take advanced work for credit. If the subject is taught by a properly licensed teacher and is designated by the board as meeting the high school curriculum requirements, then the “advanced work” counts towards the student’s high school graduation requirements.

13. Does a student have to pass a set of proficiency tests in order to receive a high school diploma?

Yes, students must receive passing scores on the Ohio Graduation Tests in order to receive a high school diploma. (RC 3313.61.) That same statute also states that a student must complete the high school curriculum or, if disabled, his or her Individualized Education Program (IEP) in order to receive a high school diploma.

14. What if a student has completed the curriculum or IEP but has not passed the Ohio Graduation Tests?

Students with IEPs can be excused from the diploma requirement to pass the Ohio Graduation Tests. Other students who have completed high school but have not passed the test must be allowed to retake the test whenever they are administered in the district. (RC 3301.0711(B)(8))

15. Do boards have the authority to bestow academic honors on students who have performed well academically?

Yes. The State Board has promulgated a regulation (OAC Rule 3301-13-07) which sets forth the requirements for awarding an honors diploma. However, boards retain the authority to bestow other academic awards as well.

16. Can we publicize the fact that certain students have received academic awards?

Student records are generally confidential under state and federal laws. However, student awards are considered “directory information” which can be disclosed. However, directory information cannot be disclosed to persons or entities engaged in a profit-making activity. Moreover, parents have the right to request that directory information concerning their children not be disclosed at all. Check to determine whether parents have exercised this option prior to publicizing academic awards received by your students.

There are many other topics which potentially effect student achievement. A complete catalogue of all laws which potentially impact student achievement is beyond the scope of this kit. We hope the foregoing has given you some ideas to assist your students in doing their best!