

The School Board's Role & Responsibility In Equity And Potential Outcomes



Many of Alaska's schools are working towards equitable outcomes for each and every student in their school. School boards and superintendents, through their governance role, have a responsibility in ensuring equity stays at the forefront of district priorities. Through the board's key roles school boards can establish policies, practices, and structures for an educational system in which each student can be successful.

Through the school board's four primary responsibilities and key roles, boards can have significant impact on outcomes of all students in their district. This includes:

- Reviewing, developing and adopting policy to govern the district
- Setting and approving the district budget (allocate resources)
- Reviewing and adopting curriculum and instruction
- Hiring and evaluating the superintendent

One additional role of the board that can impact equity includes:

- Establishing the mission, vision and a strategic plan for the district.

Each of these responsibilities can have intentional or unintentional consequences for equity within your school.

Reviewing, developing and adopting policy to govern the district

The board is responsible for adopting policy to govern the district. It is through board policy that the operation and implementation of the local school system is carried out.

Policy is the "Why & the What"

The board, with the assistance of the superintendent, reviews the need for policy additions or modifications that create governance.

Administrative Regulation (AR) is the "How"

The superintendent, along with staff and administrators creates administrative regulations that put into practice the policies the board has approved

What can boards do:

- Review all board policies through the lens of cultural safety, disproportionality, and equity. This may require expert assistance and training on understanding student data, legal consultation, or facilitation for policy review.
- Review AASB policy recommendations that focus on cultural safety and trauma informed adaptations. Determine if these policies are appropriate for your district and community contexts.
- Develop new policies that may be needed to create a more trauma informed or community responsive school system that results in greater equity of opportunity for each student.

- Work with the superintendent (while staying within the board role) to create administrative regulations that will implement the board’s policies regarding equity and cultural safety or responsiveness.
- Develop a culture of equity accountability and improvement on the board and within the district (board self-assessments, superintendent evaluation, district and school performance indicators)

For Reflection:

- Are policies recognizing the needs of your community?
- Do policies incorporate a cultural safety and culturally responsive lens?
- Have policies been reviewed for trauma informed and restorative approaches that align with the districts core philosophies?
- Are policies designed to ensure safety, compliance and a developmental approach to student success?
- Do policies support a multi-tiered system of support for academic, social and behavioral development?
- Do policies address disproportionality (Considering how suspensions, discipline, referrals to specialized programs, are located within one group of students or families)?

Set and approve the district budget (allocate resources)

The board has the ultimate authority to allocate resources each year to run the district. The school district budget is a plan for the allocation of funds. Development of the district budget should be guided by the implementation of the district strategic plan and annual board priorities. The board priorities should align to the strategic plan and particular growth areas highlighted in the district.

What can boards do:

- Align the budget with the strategic plan and vision for the district
- Review resource allocation through the perspective of an “equity lens” on a regular basis.
- Use data to better understand instructional, climate, social and emotional, or other gaps that exist for students that could be addressed by a budgetary decision.
- Budget strategically for the years to come (3 to 5 years)
- Create accountability systems to monitor the effectiveness of resource allocation on student achievement (Data analysis- who is receiving programs are the programs providing the intended outcome)

For Reflection:

- Do school board members and district staff developing and approving the budget consider the impact of funding various academic, social, and behavioral development of students?
- Where are resources allocated and which students will benefit in the programs?
- Who are programs reaching and what are the impacts of the programs?
- What are key gaps for specific groups of students? (e.g. students that enter kindergarten without pre-school, students that have limited family support).
- Are there programs that need additional resources to create equity? (i.e. early childhood program access, acceleration support for reading & mathematics, trauma informed practices, behavioral

coaches, culturally responsive training and frameworks for staff, family partnerships, support for chronically absent, learning and behavior)

Review and adopt curriculum and instruction

School boards have the ultimate authority and responsibility to formally adopt the curriculum and instructional materials used within the district to educate students. While school boards may be experts on their communities, school board members are not curriculum experts and thus must rely on the expertise of the superintendent and staff to provide recommendations for the curriculum. The board has a responsibility to understand the recommendations presented and to ask questions about how curriculum is relevant and effective within students in the district.

Making sure curriculum and instructional materials provide educational techniques and materials that are student-centered, culturally relevant and responsive to the community can help to ensure each student has an equitable chance for learning success.

What can boards do:

- In policy, define the expectation for curriculum and instructional materials to be culturally responsive and relevant.
- Ensure the superintendent and curriculum committee(s) utilizes the district strategic plan and annual board priorities to help inform curriculum review and adoption.
- Make sure all stakeholders know what the process is for review and adoption and how each stakeholder group may be able to participate. This must be a public process and responsive to ensuring all stakeholders have an opportunity to engage.

For Reflection:

- What are the current outcomes for students in the district, and how will this curriculum address the standards and outcomes?
- What adaptations may be needed for implementing curriculum in your district and community contexts?

Hire and evaluate the superintendent

The school board is responsible for hiring, supervising and evaluating one employee directly, the superintendent of the district. The superintendent serves as the educational leader an expert for the district. The superintendent serves as a critical member of the governance team as they are responsible for the implementation of the board's policies and priorities as well as the adopted strategic plan.

What can boards do:

- Boards must be thoughtful, deliberative, and responsive when establishing the required and desired knowledge, education, experience, characteristics, and skills needed for the superintendent position.
- Boards must establish effective and continual communications with their superintendent.
- Boards must establish and implement a superintendent performance evaluation that enables frequent communication and monitoring of both the job performance and the district's performance with regard to student achievement and the fulfillment of the strategic plan.
- Ensure that measures of equity are incorporated into the evaluation so that the board may judge the superintendent's progress and effectiveness.

For Reflection:

- What questions have you incorporated into your interviews and hiring process to get an understanding of your superintendents ideas on equity?
- What opportunities are there to encourage access to superintendent training for community members and minority groups in your community?
- How do you use your strategic plan in the evaluation of the superintendent?
- What are the key measures of equity you are reviewing in your district?
- How do you keep these on the agenda for board meetings to monitor progress throughout the year?

Leadership guided through mission, vision and a strategic planning

The board is a locally elected, public body responsible for the governance of the school district. The school board, in concert with the superintendent and the district administration comprise the leadership team. The school board plays a crucial leadership role making sure the district has policies that not only uphold state and federal law but also provide guidance for effective implementation of the strategic plan. Most importantly, through policy, budgeting, curriculum and selecting an effective superintendent, the board provides leadership to deliver an educational system that creates equity of opportunity for every student to succeed.

What can boards do:

- Outline a vision for student success that includes all students for the district.
- Place equity and community values at the core of the vision, mission, and strategic plan.
- Use data and community conversations to understand needs of families and students that can contribute to equitable outcomes.
- Establish specific and measurable goals that provide clear direction for district staff to address equity.
- Keep strategic goals and outcomes on each agenda for reports on progress.

For Reflection:

Effective school board leadership takes, work, dedication, deliberation and education. It means having to create priorities and often make difficult and sometimes controversial decisions. Those decisions require good data to inform the board and stakeholders and the board must have a passion and interest to see all students achieve and be successful.