

SCHOOL COMMITTEE SELF-EVALUATION

The Education Reform Act of 1993 strengthened the requirement for accountability in the delivery of education to our students. To that end, the law now calls for the superintendent of schools to "cause the evaluation" of every employee in the school system.

But who is to evaluate the school committee, if not the school committee itself? While it is true that as individuals, members of the committee are "evaluated" when they stand for re-election or reappointment there is no prescribed agency, no prescribed vehicle for the school committee, as a body, to be evaluated -except by the body itself!

Why do a self-evaluation? While there are many potential benefits, there are two essential questions that could be answered. They are:

- 1. Is the committee doing the right things?**

- 2. Are the "right things" being done the "right way"?**

The Massachusetts Association of School Committees has developed this package to serve as a guide to members who wish to conduct a self-evaluation. The guide is more of a process than an instrument. Self-evaluation by the school committee can yield significant insights and improvement in the total operation of the committee. It can also demonstrate to the entire organization the committee's affirmation of, and commitment to, improvement and accountability in the continuing implementation of Education Reform.

As always, the Association is ready to assist you whatever your needs may be. Please call our office to talk to a staff member or to set up an on-site visit with a Field Director.

The Process for Conducting a Self-Evaluation

The process for performing a self-evaluation is a three-step process:

- 1. Planning the evaluation**
- 2. Completing the evaluation**
- 3. Processing the data**

Planning the evaluation requires the committee to reach agreement on areas of evaluation. This can include, but is certainly not limited to, the following areas of concern:

- governance
- operations
- member relations
- committee/superintendent relations
- strategic planning
- community relations
- fiscal management
- conduct of school committee meetings

A list of specific items that you may want to consider in each category is listed in the appendix to this document.

At this point it is important to note that while the process for the evaluation of the superintendent calls for clear, measurable goals; the committee need not restrict itself to that specifically for this process. Much of what the committee needs to address are the more subjective and *qualitative* factors in areas such as group dynamics that are such an integral part of a school committee's effectiveness.

Once the committee has met (with or without the help of a facilitator) to decide on what categories will be incorporated into the evaluation, they can begin to choose the *descriptors* within each category (See appendix) . This important step may involve a considerable amount of discussion. Try not to "split hairs" and have too many variations of the same point. Later in the process, you should recognize that one of the key benefits of self-evaluation is the actual discussion among committee members as you review the results. Once you have settled on the categories and descriptors, you are ready to complete the self-evaluation.

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When establishing a deadline for completing the evaluation, it is important to give each member enough time so they won't feel rushed. It is common for each evaluation to be anonymous. Designate someone to collect the forms and do a composite scoring.

Processing the data can often be more effective when the committee uses a facilitator. Many of the issues and examples that will be used by members in the discussion can involve personalities and interpersonal dynamics and an objective non-member can be an invaluable aid in keeping the dialogue on-track and focused.

Remember that a key benefit, apart from the "report card" that results from the processing of data, is the enlightening (and non-threatening) discussion of issues that would never have been "agenda items" on their own. To this end, try and choose a setting that is comfortable and informal. While the meeting must be an open meeting, it must be set up for the benefit of committee members to have an honest and productive dialogue. Limit the discussion to the participants.

There are two ways to look at the scoring. The most obvious way is to find the areas where there is strong agreement. If there is strong agreement that improvement is needed in a particular area, then this should become part of your new "action plan." If there is agreement that something is working, then keep up the good work!

The other way to view the scoring is to look for areas where there is no strong agreement. If half the committee believes the committee does a great job on the budget, and half the committee believes that there is room for improvement, then an area for discussion has been identified. It is in these discussions that members can learn about each other, find ways to reach common ground, and develop a plan to move forward together. The most important thing is not to let the report hang in the air - use it to develop your own "professional development plan" for the school committee. Ask your facilitator or one of your members to draft a synopsis of your discussion, and initiate plans to put into action the ideas generated in the process, or to develop a plan for the committee to receive training.

Appendix

Scoring is done as follows:

1-Strongly agree

2-Agree

3-Disagree

4-Don't know

Sample Descriptors

Governance

The school committee is a governing body, charged with setting the educational goals and objectives for the school system, adopting policies that enable the administration to achieve these goals and objectives, adopting a budget to provide necessary resources, the hiring and evaluation of the superintendent, and the ongoing review and evaluation of the school system's performance in fulfilling its mission.

1. The committee's policies are clear and up-to-date. _____
2. The committee has adopted a mission statement. _____
3. The committee regularly evaluates its progress relative to the goals and objectives that have been adopted. _____
4. The committee refrains from involvement in the administration of the school system. _____
5. The committee members take part in educational workshops and conferences to help them make informed decisions. _____

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Operations

Any group or team functions best when the norms, rules and dynamics are spelled out, easily understood, and agreed upon. Aside from certain Massachusetts General Laws and Robert's Rules of Order, the school committee generally develops its own ways of doing things. City charters and town by-laws may also provide direction for the committee. The more that is discussed up front, the smoother the process for making decisions can be.

1. Roles of committee officers are defined in committee policy and understood by all members. _____
2. New members receive introductory training and orientation when they join the committee. _____
3. Procedures and protocols for committee operations are published and understood. _____

Member Relations

Group dynamics and teamwork are an extremely important part of school committee success. Members can have strong opinions on issues yet still remain open-minded and willing to work out differences. How committee members treat each other goes a long way in affecting the ultimate success of the committee as a whole and as individuals.

1. Members treat each other with courtesy and respect. _____
2. All members are encouraged to voice opinions and take positions on issues. _____
3. Members respect the will of the majority and support decisions once they are made. _____
4. Members share pertinent information with each other to prevent surprises and promote informed decision making. _____
5. Members "do their homework" and come prepared to make decisions. _____
6. Members understand the role of the individual as part of the whole group. _____

1-Strongly agree

2-Agree

3-Disagree

4-Don't know

Committee/Superintendent Relations

The superintendent is a critical member of the management team, implementing school committee policies and leading the school system in the direction set by the school committee. The relationship between the committee and the superintendent is an area that deserves the utmost attention and care.

1. The committee regularly evaluates the superintendent using a mutually agreed-upon process. _____
2. The types and frequency of communications are agreed to in advance. _____
3. The superintendent is accessible to committee members. _____
4. Committee members contact the superintendent when seeking information. _____
5. The superintendent informs the committee of major personnel decisions. _____
6. The superintendent and committee treat each other with mutual respect and professionalism. _____
7. Both the committee and the superintendent operate on a "no-surprises" model. _____

1-Strongly agree

2-Agree

3-Disagree

4-Don't know

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Strategic Planning and Fiscal Management

The school committee is accountable to the community for the responsible management of the school system's finances. It is also responsible for providing the resources necessary to enable the school system to perform its mission. Solid planning is needed to maximize short-term and long-term allocation of resources.

1. A long term, strategic plan exists and is regularly reviewed. _____
2. All constituencies of the school district are involved in the strategic planning process. _____
3. The budget process is documented and published. _____
4. Budgets are developed based on needs, from the "bottom-up." _____
5. The committee, as a group, presents and advocates the budget to the community. _____
6. The committee receives regular reports with budget and financial status for the school system. _____

Community Relations

The school committee is the chief advocate for students in the community. As such, it needs to strive for a positive relationship between the community and the school system. The perception of the school system's quality impacts nearly all facets of the system, and is an integral component of school committee success in advocacy.

1. The committee has a public relations plan for the school system. _____
2. The committee encourages the inclusion of community member in as much decision making as possible. _____
3. The committee works cooperatively with other branches of municipal government. _____
4. The school system regularly reports its own progress and accomplishments. _____

1-Strongly agree

2-Agree

3-Disagree

4-Don't know

Conduct of Meetings

The quality of school committee meetings affects not only the quality of committee decisions and committee credibility, but also the level of confidence the community has in the committee. School committee decisions can be made only at these meetings, which often provide the public its only "window" into the school system. The meeting agenda is planned jointly by the committee chairman and the superintendent, and must be adhered to by the committee.

1. Committee members receive sufficient information far enough in advance to prepare for meetings. _____
2. Public input is welcomed, and is done according to an established policy. _____
3. Full and sufficient debate is allowed. _____
4. Discussion is focused on issues, not personalities. _____
5. The physical setting is conducive to productive discussion and decision making. _____
6. Meetings are frequent enough to prevent overcrowded agendas. _____

1-Strongly agree

2-Agree

3-Disagree

4-Don't know