Sounding Board

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Promoting Quality Charter School Governance
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What Boards Need to Know About Academics

Introduction

The primary purpose of all charter schools in Minnesota is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement. That means regardless of the success of your school's mission and vision, your school must be accountable for pupil learning and student achievement. Therefore, your Board is responsible for monitoring and ultimately ensuring that your school is achieving its primary purpose. Charter school board members often say, "But I am not a teacher and therefore can't evaluate student performance," and proceed to leave it up to the school leader or the teachers on the board. While the school leader can certainly help the Board evaluate the degree to which the school achieves its primary purpose, it is ultimately the Board's responsibility to ensure the school meets this section of statute. Therefore, Board members should become familiar with the key measures to monitor.

Contractual Indicators

The place to start lies in the school's contract with its authorizer. For Osprey Wilds, the school contract contains a number of appendix documents referred to as exhibits, one of which is Exhibit G: Academic and Academic-Related Goals. This is the document that clearly articulates the indicators that the school and Osprey Wilds have agreed to use as the measure of the school's academic success. There are ten indicators within which measures are developed. Each of these, if applicable to the school, should be monitored by the Board:

- **Mission:** The measures in this category are at the heart of why your school exists. These goals are designed by your school to measure what matters to the school in regards to mission completion. These measures will also help the board know if the school is meeting its mission. They are agreed to by Osprey Wilds and are the primary drivers of how OW evaluates the degree to which the school is achieving its mission. While your Board likely monitors many items that serve as examples of mission work, the items in Exhibit G are the ones that OW uses as definitive measures.

Questions Boards might consider asking about mission-related goals:
- ✓ *Are we able to determine if we are achieving our mission based on these measures? In other words, do these measures get at the heart of our mission?*
- ✓ *Do the results show we are meeting our mission? Can we determine that from the data available?*
- ✓ *What performance should be strengthened? What resources does the Board need to allocate to achieve that improvement?*
- ✓ *What measures are we easily meeting, and should the target be raised to push us farther?*
- ✓ *Is our mission still serving the students at our school?*
- ✓ *Are we meeting our contractual goals? Within this indicator area, are there certain measures where we are doing better than others?*

- **English Language Learners:** The measures in this category assess to what degree emergent bilingual or multilingual students are making progress on English language acquisition. While schools may have many different measures in this area, OW requires two standard measures for all schools serving a significant population of English Learners, both based on the state's accountability test, ACCESS:
  - ◦ <u>Percent of students meeting their target</u>. For this, each student has an individual target which they either met or did not meet. This measure looks at the number of students that met their individual targets, divided by the total number of English Learners.
  - ◦ <u>Average progress toward target</u>. In this measure, each student's progress toward their individual target is added together with all other students' progress toward their respective targets and the sum is divided by the total number of students with targets.

These two measures are compared to all English Learners in the state to determine whether the school meets its goals.

> *Questions Boards might consider asking:*
> ✓ Are our English language learners making expected growth in language acquisition?
> ✓ *What support structures does the school have in place to meet the needs of English Learners?*
> ✓ *If performance doesn't meet target, what additional resources should be allocated to get better outcomes?*
> ✓ *Are we meeting our contractual goals? Within this indicator area, are there certain measures where we are doing better than others?*
> ✓ *What plans does the school leader or instructional leadership team have to ensure the school is meeting its contractual goals in this area?*

- **Growth (Reading & Math):** The growth measures are split between two indicators: one for reading and one for math. While schools may have additional measures in this category, generally OW requires two types of measures for all schools:
  - ◦ <u>North Star Progress</u>. This compares the achievement level (Exceeds, Meets, Partially Meets and Does Not Meet) of each student for the prior year to the current year. The percentage of students who increase, decrease, or stay in the Did Not Meet categories are compared to the state population as a whole.
  - ◦ <u>L</u>ocally Administered Standardized Assessment. Each school in OW's portfolio are expected to administer a school-based standardized assessment. Common instruments are NWEA MAP, STAR, FastBridge, aimsweb. These tools develop individual growth targets for students based on a certain learning period (e.g. Fall to Spring, Fall to Fall, Winter to Winter, etc.) and identify if individual students met their expected targets during that period. The percentage of students who meet their individual targets is assessed, with a standard expectation of 50% or greater to meet target.

> *Questions Boards might consider asking:*
> ✓ *Are our students making expected growth in reading and math?*
> ✓ *What factors impact students' growth? Are there structures or supports that are needed to accelerate performance?*
> ✓ *Are staff trained and able to use the data to inform their instruction?*
> ✓ *What intervention strategies are in place to support student growth?*
> ✓ *How does the school support students with high achievement but exhibiting low growth (i.e. support for gifted and talented students)?*
> ✓ *Is our instructional model set up to achieve high growth in core measures? If not, what might be changed?*
> ✓ *Are we meeting our contractual goals? Within this indicator area, are there certain measures where we are doing better than others?*

- **Proficiency (Reading, Math & Science):** The proficiency measures are split among three indicators, one each for reading, math, and science. While schools may have additional measures in this category, generally OW requires the use of MCA data to compare the percentage of students proficient and approaching proficient at the school to be compared with the state and local district. OW uses proficiency index, a formula that takes the total number of students who meet or exceed on the MCAs <u>PLUS</u> one half of the number of students who score partially proficient and <u>DIVIDES</u> that number by the total number

of students who tested. OW also compares specific student populations to determine if there are any gaps. (i.e. Does one student group have lower performance that is masked when looking only at the total student population as a whole?)

Questions Boards might consider asking:
- ✓ *How does the school's growth relate to proficiency?*
- ✓ *Are students with high growth able to reach proficiency before matriculation?*
- ✓ *If our school's demographics mirror the local district, why do our proficiency rates differ (if they do)?*
- ✓ *Is our instructional model set up to achieve grade level proficiency in core measures? If not, what might be changed?*
- ✓ *Do gaps exist between specific student groups (e.g. students eligible for free and reduced price lunch, students receiving Special Education services, English Learners), and if so, what supports are in place to close that gap?*
- ✓ *Are we meeting our contractual goals? Within this indicator area, are there certain measures where we are doing better than others?*

- **Other Proficiency and Growth:** This is a catch-all indicator area to contain other academic priorities important to the school. Most notably this section includes Kindergarten Readiness goals for school's serving kindergarten and pre-kindergarten students. Many schools place writing, social studies, or social-emotional learning goals in this category.

  Questions Boards might consider asking:
  - ✓ *What other measures directly impact academic success that we may wish to measure?*
  - ✓ *Are our students provided the skills to be healthy and successful? How do we know?*
  - ✓ *Are we meeting our contractual goals? Within this indicator area, are there certain measures where we are doing better than others?*
  - ✓ *What plans does the school leader or instructional leadership team have to ensure the school is meeting its contractual goals in this area?*

- **Post-Secondary Readiness**: This indicator is present for schools that serve students in Grades 9-12. While schools may have additional measures in this category, generally OW includes graduation rates (spanning from 4-7 years) and compares those rates to the state. Graduation may also be compared to the local district or to alternative education settings, depending on the priorities of the school. Additional indicators can be college/career readiness and include ACT, Accuplacer, or ASVAB scores, completion of PSEO or apprenticeship/training programs while in high school, and acceptance into a post-secondary program.

  Questions Boards might consider asking:
  - ✓ *Are we ensuring that students are provided the support they need to graduate from high school?*
  - ✓ *Are we preparing students for an array of career choices following high school?*
  - ✓ *Are our students provided the skills to be healthy and successful in the post-secondary world?*
  - ✓ *Are we meeting our contractual goals? Within this indicator area, are there certain measures where we are doing better than others?*

- **Attendance:** School attendance provides insights into student engagement, school culture, and connection – and attendance rates are strongly linked with academic outcomes. There are two types of measures in this indicator: overall attendance and consistent attendance.
  - ◦ Overall attendance is the percentage of school days attended for the entire student body divided by the total possible days for the entire student body. While this was the standard measure in past contracts, the state of Minnesota no longer reports overall attendance percentages for schools or the state. (Your school, however, likely still tracks this information and may

report on it in the Annual Report.
- ◦ Consistent attendance is the percentage of students in the school that attended 90% or more of the days that was possible for them to attend. Consistent attendance helps you understand if students are attending school regularly. This is the attendance measure that MDE is tracking, and the new standard measure OW is tracking.

Questions Boards might consider asking:
- ✓ *Is attendance an indicator of our student engagement?*
- ✓ *How might students' and family connections to our school impact our attendance?*
- ✓ *What barriers are students facing to attend at consistent or high rates?*
- ✓ *What interventions or supports does the school provide to increase attendance?*
- ✓ *Is the school complying with state and county laws regarding truancy and educational neglect filings?*
- ✓ *How might our suspension rates be impacting attendance?*
- ✓ *Are we meeting our contractual goals? Within this indicator area, are there certain measures where we are doing better than others?*

In Conclusion

Board members come from a variety of backgrounds and look at issues through very different lenses. It is important that the Board use that diversity to evaluate the success of the school's educational program and ensure that school staff have what they need to achieve the school's primary purpose—to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement. Osprey Wilds expects Boards to monitor progress toward the school's academic goals at least four times per year – evaluating data in relation to goals. As Boards start to engage in these conversations (not just downloading the information the school leader gives them), they can learn more about the school's educational program, ask important questions, and help the school strengthen its results.

More resources can be found on our website

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