Progress Monitoring Student Outcomes

WHAT IS MONITORING?

Progress monitoring provides school boards the opportunity to evaluate the alignment between the community's vision (goals towards student outcomes) and the school district's reality (current student performance/growth). While student outcome goals and current student performance may not match perfectly, it only becomes problematic when there is no evidence of student growth and progress. And even if students aren't yet growing and making progress, that's only catastrophic if the superintendent doesn't have sufficiently aggressive strategies in place for increasing growth and helping students make progress. These are the fundamental concerns of monitoring: 1) does reality match the vision, 2) is there growth toward the vision, and 3) is there a strategy and plan sufficient to cause growth toward the vision?

- If the answer to all three is yes, then the board can accept the monitoring report confident that the superintendent is performing.
- If the answer to only one or two of these questions is yes, the board may opt to table the matter (see *Keep the Conversation Going* below).
- If the answer to all three is no, the board may opt to reject the report and reflect on how to respond to the superintendent's non-performance.

HOW IS MONITORING BENEFICIAL?

In addition to clarifying student and superintendent performance, monitoring -- when done well -- confers several other organizational benefits:

- **Lead by Example**: What happens in the boardroom is more likely to be echoed in the classroom. Board behavior sets the culture for an institution. If board members want a culture where teachers are open and reflective in their craft, they set the stage for that by demonstrating what it looks like for the board and superintendent to be open and reflective -- grounded in student outcomes data -- in their craft as well.
- **Clarify Strategies**: When the board receives monitoring reports from the superintendent, the report should include how the superintendent will respond to the data. If the data says things are slightly off track, the superintendent's strategy should reflect that. If the data says that performance is completely off track, the superintendent's strategy should reflect the urgency that the current reality demands.
- **Communicate Expectations**: By investing at least 50% of the board's time each month into monitoring progress toward the vision, the board makes clear what the priorities of the entire organization are expected to be. This is a powerful tool for creating organizational alignment.
- **Formative Evaluation**: With each monitoring report the board is conducting a micro assessment of superintendent performance which creates an opportunity for the superintendent to make adjustments. As a continuous improvement strategy, providing this regularly recurring feedback loop is a superior approach to the outdated concept of merely conducting annual performance evaluations.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MONITORING

- **Do Your Homework**: Board members should arrive at board meetings having already read the monitoring report and having already come up with at least three or four questions each regarding the "who", "what", "why", and "how" of the monitoring report (see *During Monitoring* below).
- **Understanding Reality**: The desired result of monitoring is to understand the current reality for your students as compared to the vision you've adopted for them (goals). Whether you enjoy the current reality isn't the point of monitoring; whether or not you fully know the current reality is.
- **Keep the Conversation Going**: If the superintendent presents a monitoring report that is missing the prerequisites (see *Before Monitoring* below) or that fails to clarify for board members the extent to which reality matches the goals, consider tabling the conversation and giving the superintendent a chance to fix it and re-offer it at a subsequent meeting, instead of choosing not to accept it and ending the discussion.
- **No Gotcha Governance**: Adopt a monitoring calendar that describes which goals will be monitored during which months. The ideal monitoring calendar will span the full term of the goals -- if they are five year goals, the calendar should cover five years.
- **Don't Offer Advice**: Monitoring is never an opportunity for board members to provide advice to the superintendent regarding what should/shouldn't be done about student outcomes. It's also not about liking/not liking the superintendent's strategies.

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BEFORE MONITORING

Here are four issues to ask about the monitoring report before you can begin progress monitoring (if the answer to any of these is "no", hand the report back to the Superintendent and have them complete it before proceeding -- likely at the next regularly scheduled board meeting):

1. Does it clearly show what is being monitored (which specific policy / end / goal / interpretation / etc)?
2. Does it clearly show data for the 3 previous reporting periods (preferably on a line graph)? Does it clearly show the current reporting period? Does it clearly show the target reporting periods (annual targets and deadline target)?
3. Does it clearly show the Superintendent's evaluation of performance?
4. Does it clearly show supporting documentation that evidences the Superintendent's evaluation? If the district is not at target or the Superintendent's evaluation indicates implementation is not on track, does the monitoring report clearly describe any needed next steps?

DURING MONITORING

Monitoring is about understanding the extent to which reality matches policy -- and in this case, the Board's adopted goals / ends. Monitoring is never about offering advice or recommendations. The Board's curiosity is focused on what's true for students, not on what adults are/aren't doing. Here are observations to look for / questions to ask (and the order in which to ask them) that support progress monitoring. Notice that none of these questions offer advice concerning which inputs/outputs the Superintendent should select; these are monitoring questions, not managing questions.

Who?	What?	Why?	How?
Which students are the data talking about? [past focus]	Which circumstances surrounded the data for struggling and excelling students? [past focus]	Which phenomenon helps describe what happened? [past focus]	Which changes will happen based on the data? [future focus]
• Who is struggling the most? • Who is getting it the most? • Who is not moving? • Who is not included in this data?	• What is currently happening? • What else do we need to know about this? • What did we learn from this? • What are the strengths? • What are the limitations? • What gaps exist between student groups? • What's working? Not working? • What do you see as accounting for <anomalous data in report>?	• Why is it working in this area? • Why is it not working in this area? • Why such a significant growth? • Why was there no growth? • Why do gaps between student groups exist? • Why is <data point a> so much <higher or lower> than <data point b>?	• How can we replicate what is happening in ___? • Given what we know about __, how are you going to speed up the progress? • How do you know that strategy is going to work? • How are we going to address __ (issue not resolved)? • How might changes show up in the future (budget, etc.)? • How can the board help?

AFTER MONITORING

Once the Board has completed the task of monitoring and chosen to accept or not accept the report (and only *after*), then it is appropriate to ask: is this still the right policy?