

# School Board Focus Questions



This resource offers guiding questions for school board members to consider on a variety of important topics. Board members can use this resource to help plan out priorities for the year through the use of focused questions on key topics. This resource can be used in conjunction with the [Sample Governing Board Focus by Month](#) resource to map out topics for the year.

This list of questions and topics is not exhaustive. Rather, this list can provide a starting point of questions for board members to consider based on their individual and the collective board's priorities.

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## Data Access

- How does the board ensure that data it receives from school leaders is accurate and comprehensive? Are systems in place to quickly get the board additional data if needed?
- As part of the board's strategic plan, what data has the board identified/requested that should be included in the management/school leader's board reports?

## Student Recruitment & Retention

- Is the school on track to meet its projected student enrollment? If not, does the board need to make staffing or budgetary adjustments?
- To what extent do student demographics reflect local demographics?
- Is the school on track to meet its special population (i.e. students of color, students with IEPs, gifted and talented students, English Learners, economically disadvantaged students) enrollment targets? If not, what is the plan to do so?
- If enrollment is under budget after October Count, what adjustments are necessary for programming or budget? What caused lower enrollment and who will be responsible for adjusting strategies for next year?
- Has the board reviewed student recruitment, retention, and marketing plans? What does student retention look like at each grade level? If administered, do exit surveys provide a sense of the common reasons students leave the school?
- How will the school make good faith recruitments and retention efforts for students with disabilities, students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch, and English Learner populations based on goals set from last year's outcomes? Are these efforts reflected in the student recruitment and retention plans?
- How is the board monitoring student recruitment and retention efforts for specific populations? What is the demographic breakdown of newly enrolled students and returning students?
- What is your school's enrollment process (first come, first served; lottery; weighted lottery)? When does the school leader report on enrollment efforts for the upcoming year to the board? Should there be any changes to the student recruitment plan based on the enrollment results including recruitment of target populations?

## Staff Recruitment

- What staff positions remain unfilled, and what is the plan to fill them with appropriately qualified people? What contingency plans are in place should certain staff roles remain unfilled before school opening?
- If vacant positions exist, what is the plan to fill those roles and how can the board support? How are school leaders ensuring functions of vacant roles are being completed?

- If administered, is the board reviewing staff satisfaction survey results? How is the data used to inform decision making and priorities? (For example, if staff are leaving due to low compensation, is the board considered working with the HOS to revise the salary schedule or increase compensation?)
- Has the board created annual goals for the head of school regarding staff recruitment and retention?
- To what extent do staff demographics reflect our student population? How is leadership addressing staff demographics in school staff recruitment strategies?
- How is the board evaluating the outcomes of staff recruitment and attrition from the prior school year? Are there any indications that it may be necessary to review benefits, culture, etc. to attract and retain well-qualified staff?

## Culture

- [If your school uses surveys to assess culture]
  - What are the key findings from the surveys sent to students, teachers and parents? What might be some things that emerged from the survey that should be considered in the strategic planning or goals for the following year?
  - Who is responsible for drafting and reviewing the survey that will be used? Who gathers the survey results? Are the surveys confidential and who has access?
- How is the school performing in early year indicators of school culture and discipline such as absences, tardies, and suspensions? How does this compare with strategic goals the board has established?
- What are your school's student attendance and suspension rates for the year? How does this rate compare to last year (three years, five years)? How do attendance and discipline rates compare for each subgroup?

## School Leader Evaluation

- Who is going to take the lead on the school leader evaluation process? What evaluation tool will be used?
- Is there a school evaluation process in place before the start of the school year? Has it been shared with the head of school?
- Have the school leader performance goals been set? Do the goals align with the board's strategic priorities and/or the school's mission and vision?
- How is the board checking in with the school leader on midyear progress against their performance goals? Does the board have plans and resources in place to support the school leader's development against those goals?

- Has the board started its process to evaluate school leadership and/or its CMO/EMO against the goals and priorities set at the beginning of the school year? Does the board have sufficient information to support these evaluation processes?
- What feedback is provided to the school leader in advance of the formal evaluation?
- Has the board completed the school leader evaluation process for the year?
- Is the school leader on track to complete the performance evaluation process for all school employees?

## Student Outcomes

### State Assessment Data

CSI provides an analysis of schools' state assessment data through the CARS (CSI Annual Review of Schools) report. The academic portion of the report is made available in August and the final version of the report, which also includes finance and organizational indicators, is available in November. Boards should review the report and may consider the following guiding questions for their school leaders:

- *Academic Achievement/Status:* Mean Scale Score (MSS) is used as a measure of academic achievement. Each time a student takes a state assessment, they receive a scale score. MSS is the average performance of a group of students on an assessment. The state provides cut scores that determine whether students do not meet (shown as red), approach (shown as yellow), meet (shown as green), or exceed (shown as blue) state expectations. Are students meeting state expectations for academic achievement?
- *Growth:* a Median Growth Percentile (MGP) of 50 generally represents about one year's growth (or learning) in one year's time. This means that students performing below grade level need an MGP higher than 50 to ever reach grade level. Is the overall growth of the school high enough to move students below grade level to proficiency?
- *Overall:* Are there disparities in performance between subgroups/grades/subjects? Why?
- How will the board review assessment results in relation to the school's goals, internal strategic plan, and school leader evaluation process?

### Interim Assessment Data

Interim Assessments provide an additional tool for schools to evaluate student performance throughout the year, outside of regular state assessments. Below are questions to consider regarding interim assessment data:

- Which assessment platforms are used?
- How often are interim assessments given?
- How often is interim data presented to the board?
- When interim data is presented, look for:

- Participation. What percent of students are participating in this assessment? Are all student subgroups represented?
- Trends over time. How are students doing (using both achievement and growth measures whenever possible) compared to the last interim administration? How are they doing compared to this time last year? Two years ago?
- Data disaggregation by race/ethnicity, English Language Learner status, free and reduced lunch status, grade level, teacher, cohort (students who have been at the school 0-1 years, 2 years 3 years, etc).
- Patterns. Are certain subgroups, grades, or teachers outperforming/underperforming? Why?

### **Unified Improvement Plan (UIP)**

Colorado schools and districts can improve student learning and system effectiveness by engaging in a cycle of continuous improvement to manage their performance. To support this purpose, the Education Accountability Act of 2009 requires each Colorado district and school to create an annual improvement plan. Board should consider these questions when reviewing their school's UIP:

- Do the current Major Improvement Strategies address gaps in both State and Interim assessment data?
- How does school leadership track that Major Improvement Strategies are being implemented?
- How does school leadership know that Major Improvement Strategies are having an impact on student outcomes?

### **Assessment Administration**

- What preparations have been made for administration of the state assessments? What do current academic results indicate about likely outcomes of state assessments? What efforts are in place to support all students, including students who are at risk of failure, in meeting or exceeding proficiency?

### **Special Populations**

- If the school has populations of any subgroups (students with disabilities, ELLs, economically disadvantaged) that fall below the performance of similar students in the geographic district, have school leaders presented viable plans to address those gaps?
- How did subgroups (students with disabilities, English Learners, economically disadvantaged, minorities) perform last year? How does this compare with their non-subgroup peers, the school's accountability plan, and board's strategic plan goals?
- How is the board ensuring that school leaders have an accurate process in place for identifying students with disabilities and ELLs among newly enrolled students?

- How is the school ensuring that it will be ready to serve new students with disabilities and ELLs? Who is reviewing new student applications/records for ELL status and IEPs?

### **Resource Allocation**

- How is the board ensuring that school leaders have all the equipment, books, and other materials required to operate successfully from the first day of school?
- What has been the return on investment for the allocated resources provided for strategic improvement of teaching and learning?
- Based on state exam results, what was the return on investment for allocated resources last school year? Are there any additional resources needed for the year ahead based on student test scores, including for special populations?
- How is the school progressing compared to the metrics and measures in its strategic plan? Are there any additional resources needed based on student outcomes?
- How is the board ensuring that curriculum and other academic resources are effectively helping leaders and teachers meet academic achievement goals? Does the academic committee and/or school leaders feel that any adjustments to curriculum choices or resources are needed, and if so, what are they and why?
- What does the school's data indicate about its strengths and areas for improvement? How do these strengths and weaknesses reflect the ways in which the board has allocated resources, and how may the board want to adjust resources going forward?

### **Postsecondary Outcomes**

- How many students are graduating or have completed their final year at your school? Are all student groups achieving the same rates of graduation/completion—why or why not?
- Does your school have a process in place to track students after they graduate or matriculate?
- For high schools with a mission of college preparation, what tools is the school using to assess college readiness? What evidence does the school have that its program is or is not preparing students for college, and what does this evidence suggest?
- [For high schools with graduating classes] How is your school performing at preparing all students to meet graduation requirements? What is the school's college acceptance rate for 2- and 4-year colleges? How is the school tracking college persistence and remediation data for its graduates?

## Finance & Operations

- Is the school on target to meet the budgeted student count? If not, do current financial forecasts include the lower funded pupil count, and is there a plan to mitigate funding decreases?
- What is the school's fund balance? How does it compare to statutory requirements, CSI requirements, and the board's requirements and goals?
- Has the finance committee reviewed the following reports each month? Year-to-Date Profit and Loss, Balance Sheet, Cash Flow Forecast, and Bank Statement(s) for all bank accounts?
- Is the school's administration analyzing the school's cash flow needs?
- Has the board reviewed enrollment targets and plans for the upcoming school year, including with school leaders? How will the board receive updates on progress through the spring recruitment season?
- Has the board established a timeline and priorities for formulating next year's budget, including time to discuss any changing resource needs (e.g. new curricula, etc) with school leaders?
- Does the budget align with the priorities that were previously established by the board and school leadership?
- Does the budget include a technology refresh plan? Has the board reviewed the technology refresh plan?
- Has the board reviewed a 3-5 year forecast annually?
- Has the board identified any long-term financing needs? Are there opportunities to refinance existing loans?
- Has the board reviewed its Financial Policies and Procedures, updated it to reflect most current systems and structures, and approved it by vote?
- What contracts are set to expire on/before June 30th? Has the board designated someone on the board to review, and someone in school leadership to negotiate expiring contracts?

## Audit

When an auditor presents an independent audit to the board (or the board's audit committee), the board asks the auditor questions. The board action is then to "accept" the audit. Boards do not approve it – nothing in the audit changes at this point, so approval/disapproval is not appropriate. The audit committee or the board should then discuss an evaluation of the auditor and determine whether to keep the auditor for the following year. Best practice is to change auditors every 3-5 years to maintain independence.

- What is the status of the financial audit? Is the auditor on target to meet the deadline as noted in the audit engagement letter? When can the board (or audit/finance committee – if appropriate) expect to see a draft of the report?
- Did the audit contain any findings and/or recommendations? If so, is administration preparing a response for the board’s consideration at the next meeting?
- Has the audit (or finance) committee reviewed the current audit contract and discussed a contract for the next fiscal audit? When will it make a recommendation to the full board?
- Was the management team cooperative and forthcoming with requested information and documentation?
- How do our accounting policies and procedures compare with those of other comparable nonprofits?
- Are there any items that might be disputed by the IRS? If yes, what documentation should be on hand to bolster the item?
- Did the management team follow suggestions noted by auditors in prior years to correct weaknesses in the internal accounting system?
- Did you discover anything regarding the financial statements or internal financial management procedures that should be brought to the attention of the board of directors?
- Do you have any suggestions for improvements in accounting, reporting, or operating procedures?
- How did the unaudited financial reporting compare to the audited financial statements? What steps can be taken to tighten up the unaudited financial reporting upon which the board relies?

## Facility

- How are any summer maintenance/renovation projects progressing? Are they within budget, and will they be completed in time for the start of school?
- Are all certificates of occupancy and insurance in place for the upcoming school year?
- Is there a long-term capital project plan for replacement of items like roofs, HVAC systems, etc.? If not, who should be in charge of studying and developing a plan for board review?
- Are there changes in facility for the following school year? Will the school have all the necessary documents to submit? Is the timeline for completion feasible and currently on time?
- Has the school submitted facility documents to the Institute for review and approval? If all documents have not been submitted, what is plan to submit, and who is responsible?
- Does the school have a complete facility timeline? Who is responsible for facilities plans and keeping the board updated?

- Was the school's annual fire inspection completed and reported? Is any remedial action required? If not, who is responsible for contacting the proper fire department authority to perform the inspection?

## Legal & Compliance

- Are there new federal, state, regulatory or contractual requirements that impact the school? Does the board need to review and/or update any of its policies accordingly?
- Has the board chair and school leader reviewed/signed CSI's Assurance of Compliance document (typically required by CSI in August of each year)?
- How many years does the school have left on its current contract? When will the contract be up for renewal, and what does the board need to do to ensure the school is prepared for renewal?
- Are there any charter modifications the school might need to consider in the meantime? If so, has the school leader or board chair contacted CSI to discuss these plans? (See Charter Modification Process and form here: <https://resources.csi.state.co.us/charter-modification/>)
- Does the student Application/Intent to Enroll form require updates? Does the board need to make changes to the Enrollment Policy? (Proposed changes to enrollment policies should be sent to CSI for review. Board-approved policies should also be sent to CSI.)
- Has the Enrollment Timeline for the upcoming school year been published (including, for example, the deadline for student applications and the lottery date)? Are processes in place to notify students and parents of acceptance/waitlist status and to request information needed for enrollment? How is the school keeping track of enrollment and waitlist numbers?
- Has the board reviewed its insurance coverages to ensure they are appropriate? Does the insurance need to be updated to include coverage for new sites? (Many certificates of liability run July 1 to June 30.)
- Has the board received assurance that all staff are appropriately fingerprinted?
- Has the board received assurance that all special education teaching staff meet appropriate certification requirements and other teaching staff are appropriately qualified for the courses they will teach?
- Has the board received assurance that new students have been identified for at-risk services and interventions are underway?
- Has the board received assurance that all students with disabilities and ELLs will receive services they are legally entitled to?
- Has the school finalized the school calendar for the upcoming school year?

## **Governance**

### **Capacity and Training**

- Does board membership meet the requirements established in the board bylaws? Has the board re-elected members whose terms have expired, elected new officers, etc.?
- What, if any, board terms expire in the upcoming year and what is the plan/process for filling upcoming vacancies?
- Have board members reviewed/signed the board member agreement and conflict of interest statement?
- What systems does the board have in place to ensure that changes in board membership and school leadership, are reported properly to CSI?
- Has the board reexamined its new board member orientation program to ensure maximum impact?
- Has the board discussed a calendar of board member development opportunities that align with the organizational goals and strategic plan?

### **Board Bylaws, Operating Procedures and Policies**

- Are the board bylaws and operating procedures working effectively? Are any changes needed to improve the board's functioning, and if so, what might those changes be?
- Have board policy updates been delivered, adopted and incorporated into the policy manual in a timely fashion? Has the board communicated the changes to CSI, as appropriate?
- Does the board have a sufficient plan for evaluating the school leader? Do any changes need to be made to the evaluation process?
- Is the Board reviewing board policies each year and updating policies when needed?

### **Board Meetings**

- Has the board developed a scope and schedule of meetings for the school year ahead and communicated it to members, school leaders, parents and other stakeholders? Is the schedule available on the board website?
- Has the board developed a plan for properly and timely posting meeting materials such as virtual sign-on information, agendas and minutes?

### **Strategic Planning and Self-Evaluation**

- Has the board developed its strategic plan and key metrics? How will the board know whether all constituencies understand and are prepared to act upon the identified goals?
- What is the plan for tracking progress on the strategic plan? What adjustments need to occur mid- year to ensure accomplishment of the strategic plan and goals?
- Does the board have a plan in place to step back and review its strategy, performance, and future development needs?

## **Morale**

- How is the board supporting school leader morale?
- How is the board assessing staff morale? Are there plans in place for the board to keep a pulse on this? How can the board support?
- How does the board plan to work with school leadership to celebrate the annual successes of the school?

## **Community**

- How is the board maintaining a presence and active involvement in the school community?
- How will the school receive feedback from parents, students and teachers?
- Does the community understand and support the mission and goals of the school? What else can be done to promote the school in the community? How will the board stay involved with the school community throughout the school year?
- What is the school communications plan and what are the roles of board members and staff if a crisis arises?