

Boards set expectations for achievement and charge the superintendent to “make it happen”. Then they want to monitor and see if progress is being made. Here is how one district monitors progress.

Accountability

Putting it into practice

Let’s say your board has set a district-wide goal of increasing reading scores. How is that job divvied up between the board and district staff? Kathy Hayes, vice president of Williamston Community School Board in Lansing, Michigan, tells how her board is addressing a similar situation:

“We made it a district-wide goal with the superintendent to increase reading scores. The community, students and teachers were all aware that this was a goal. The superintendent has to come up with some sort of plan to address the problem. What we do is monitor periodically — ‘Where are you? What is the progress?’ We keep track of the timeline and what the superintendent has said he would deliver. Then, our job is to support his program while continuing to monitor progress.”

Even students should be looking at the data say some board members. In Palisades, Pennsylvania, data are as important at the classroom level as they are at the district level. Students, like fifth-grader Rebecca Williams at Tinicum Elementary, know exactly where their grades come from because the grades are based on descriptive scoring guidelines given to them by their teachers. The guidelines spell out what students must know and demonstrate on their assignments to receive a good grade.

“They can not fully achieve their best if they don’t understand their grades and understand what is expected of them,” says Suzanne Patterson, Rebecca’s teacher.

Rebecca uses data on a daily basis. “The rubric [scoring guideline] helps me understand how to get a good grade because it shows me what I need to aim for. When I get the paper back with the rubric and it shows me what I did right and what I need to improve on. For example, in order to be an ‘expert’ we must remember to label everything. If I forgot to label something, all my teacher has to do is circle it and right away I know what I need to improve it.”

Rebecca’s experience with the scoring guidelines in her fifth-grade class is the same as the data you and your board are looking at. The data show you if students in the district are doing well, what goals have been met and what you need to continue to aim for.

Data are important to everyone. From the superintendent and staff who collect and present it the information to board members who analyze it to set policy-level goals, to the students who use the data to improve their work. When everyone is actively involved in looking at data, everyone is playing her part in improving student performance.