**Discovery Questions for School Board Members**

Many school board members know that the schools under their purview need to improve but encounter strong resistance when they try to make needed changes. Asking the right questions, and insisting on thorough answers, is a powerful technique to open up a conversation with fellow board members and administrators that can lead to real change.

Below is list of penetrating questions school board members can ask to being these necessary conversations. School Boards for Academic Excellence is here to help you navigate your next steps as you being this process. Contact us at [info@sbaenetwork.org](mailto:info@sbaenetwork.org), and thank you for your hard work on behalf the children you serve.

**Finance**

1. How much is spent per student? How much is spent per student with special needs? How much is spent per student without special needs?
2. Are staff to student ratios higher or lower than state average? Are teacher to student ratios higher or lower than state average? Are these ratios sustainable?
3. What is the usage versus capacity of each school building? When did the district last produce a facilities plan to adjust for a growing or shrinking student population?
4. When were school buildings last consolidated? How long did that process take and how effective was the process?
5. How were ESSER III federal relief funds used? Is there evidence of their effectiveness?
6. What is the target level of financial reserves?
7. What is the district’s current debt load? What is the district’s credit rating?
8. What is the district’s 5-year financial health projection?
9. What is the competitive bid process for programs? What is the competitive bid process for construction? Are existing partners effective?

**Staffing**

1. What is the starting salary and benefits package for a new teacher?
2. Are staff given exit surveys? What are the most common reasons for leaving?
3. How quickly are job applicants contacted? How long is the hiring process? What staff are involved in that process? How often are candidates lost? How does that rate compare to other districts?
4. Does the district use a "grow your own teacher" program? How many teachers does it produce annually?

**Administrative procedures**

1. How is the superintendent contract determined? Does the contract have specific performance metrics tied to compensation and renewal?
2. How quickly are requests from the board to the district central office fulfilled? How successfully are requests fulfilled?
3. What is the process for revising school board policies?
4. What is the process for identifying issues for board or committee review? Can the public influence which issues are discussed?
5. Can the district make professional development public to achieve transparency?

**Literacy**

1. Does the district use only phonics-based instruction (the “science of reading”)? Have they removed any “three-cueing” or “balanced literacy?”
2. Have teachers, especially in lower grades, retrained in phonics?
3. Do principals and coaches reinforce this method strictly? Is there evidence?
4. How does the district intervene to help students who have fallen behind?
5. Are parents made aware of their child’s reading performance?
6. What percentage of students read below grade level? What percentage of students read at a college-/career-ready pace?
7. How do the school libraries determine which books to purchase?
8. Do the libraries subscribe to any predetermined catalogs of books? Has the school board or administrators reviewed the contents of their lists?
9. Are parents automatically notified of their children’s library books?
10. What percentage of students check out at least one book per year? What is the median number of books checked out per student?

**Mathematics and science**

1. What access do middle schoolers have to advanced math courses?
2. Does the standard high school track for math set low expectations by slow walking the path to advanced algebra?
3. What percentage of students are below grade level in math? What percentage of students are on a college-/career-ready pace in math?
4. How can the district expand the variety of advanced science courses for students?
5. How does the district communicate advanced math and science options to students?

**Civics and history**

1. Do the curriculum and instructional methods include the positive aspects of the creation, heritage, and influence of the United States?
2. How are teachers guided on controversial topics?
3. Do students learn thoroughly about the past and present of their state?
4. Do students leave high school with an understanding of the American system of government and the value of civic participation?

**Graduation**

1. Do students who take trades courses complete a pathway, or are courses disconnected from each other?
2. How many students complete dual enrollment courses to earn college credit? Who are the partners of the district who could offer affordable courses?
3. How many students complete youth apprenticeships? Who are the partners of the district who could host such apprenticeships?
4. What percentage of freshmen graduate? What is the graduation rate of students by gender, race, and income level?
5. What percentage of students in each grade level has credit deficiencies? In which courses do students have credit deficiencies? Is there a pattern, and how can it be addressed?
6. Does the distribution of elementary school grades align with the distribution of high school grades? What to these grades reveal about student preparedness?
7. Does the distribution of grades align with the distribution of state test scores? What does this comparison reveal about grading standards?

**Special needs**

1. How are students with dyslexia identified? Are they identified early?
2. What percentage of students with special needs read at grade level? What percentage of students with special needs do math at grade level? What percentage of students with special needs graduate on schedule?
3. What is the rate at which students with “individualized education plans” successfully close their plans?
4. What percentage of students with special needs learn exclusively in traditional classrooms versus special needs classrooms or one-on-one?
5. How does the district protect the rights of students with special needs?

**Mental health**

1. What are parents’ rights when it comes to student-counselor conversations? How quickly must parents be notified of conversations?
2. What is considered successful treatment by counselors? Is success defined by the number of students met, certain outcomes on mental health, sexuality, or school culture?
3. How are school counselors trained?
4. Are students successfully referred for serious mental health issues?

**Safety**

1. What discipline style does the district use: traditional or “restorative justice"?
2. How does the district balance the benefit of remaining in class versus removing disruptive students?
3. What is the process for calling law enforcement to a school?
4. Have students taken a safety survey? Have parents taken a safety survey?
5. What is the policy on cell phone use? What policies do parents support?