

Adviser

What would you do if...

... your board had no official vision statement or goals?

Test scores were down. Teacher morale was at an all-time low. Enrollment at the Merrifield School District's three Title I schools was growing rapidly, while other schools in more affluent neighborhoods were losing students. School leaders were at a loss on how to handle the influx of children from poor families.

"It would certainly help if we had a vision statement and goals," Colleen Campbell told her board colleagues at a work session.

"Oh, please," countered George Gardener. "We need to take real action. The last thing we need to do is waste valuable time creating a meaningless statement and some vapid goals. We'll end up sticking those goals in a drawer and never looking at them again."

"But we have no idea what actions to take," Campbell replied. "We could go in a hundred different directions, but we have no map, no idea how to figure out the best way." Setting a vision statement and goals for the board, she said, would help board members, the superintendent, and the staff figure out what they need to do and the best way to accomplish it.

Fran Ferrara chipped in: "Some boards start by surveying the community and staff to identify the most pressing needs.

They find the process really useful."

Gardener was still against it. "Kids can't read, and all we do is set goals," he grumbled.

If you were a member of the Merrifield School Board, what would you do?

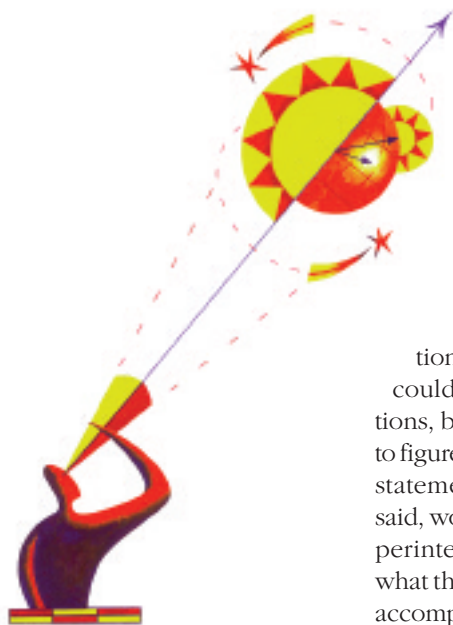
A. Work with the community and staff to develop goals and a vision statement to focus your board on what needs to be done and what role the board will play in addressing the district's problems.

B. Recognize that your board and district need help. Get an outside consultant to come in and tell you if you need a vision statement and goals.

C. Forget about goals—actions speak louder than words.

See below for our answer

Our answer: A. Vision statements and goals that end up in the drawer are indeed a waste of time. But goals that focus the board on the work to be done and its role in that work are not. Be sure to get plenty of input from staff and community in developing the goals, and be sure to specify the results you expect for each goal. Then use the vision and goals to guide your board's decisions. By setting goals and monitoring progress toward them, you are taking action—and signaling your staff and community that you are accountable for change.



Advice for the asking: If you are plagued with a prickly problem of school board service or school governance, throw it in the lap of ASBJ's cadre of consultants, known collectively as the Adviser. We'll change the names of persons and places. Then, we'll describe the problem and its suggested solution for our readers. Write: Adviser, *American School Board Journal*, 1680 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Or send us an e-mail at adviser@asbj.com, marked "Adviser." The Adviser does not represent official policy of the National School Boards Association; nor should it be construed as legal advice.

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