

# SVSU School/University Partnership Office



## Enhancing Leadership



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**Nurturing the Relationship With  
the School Board**

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# Topics To Talk About

- Communication
- Board Agendas
- Goal Setting and Implementation
- Community/School Recognition and Involvement

# General Rules And Guidelines

- Building trust and relations with the board and individual members can be time intensive in order to be effective.
- Communicate information whether positive or negative.
- Solving problems and issues is a never-ending part of K-12 education. This is not a reflective of inadequate administrative efforts UNLESS you:
  - *Do not solve issues timely AND/OR continue having the same reoccurring issues.*
  - *Ignore issues.*
  - *Do not share issues with board members that they need to know.*
  - *Pass the buck and blame administrators, parents, or staff. You are in charge.*
  - *Do not minimize concerns and issues. Be factual and reassuring of resolution at the same time. Share what you are doing to address these matters.*

# General Rules And Guidelines

- Work with and help educate board members to establish roles, expectations, and boundaries. Board members are not:
  - *Administrators*
  - *The complaint department for everyone with a problem*
- There should be an understood protocol for questions and concerns.
  - **EXAMPLE:** *In a strong board-administrative relationship, board members would direct concerns to the administrator FIRST, would contact the administrator to give a heads-up. Correspondingly, the administrator would follow-up with the concern and communicate back to the board. This may occur multiple times depending on the issue.*

# Communication Methods

- Meetings one-on-one
- Meetings in small groups (be aware to avoid potential violations of the Open Meetings Act OR even the perception of such)
- Board Meetings
- School Activities
- Community Activities
- Telephone Conversations
- Weekly/Bi-Weekly Communications: “Friday Notes,” or “Weekly Board Update” for example
- Meetings with administrators or staff
- Email
- Flyers

# Communication Methods – What, When, How Much

- In order to build an effective working relationship and build trust, administrators need to be seen as “getting out in front of issues” as much as possible. **Proactive** versus **Reactive**.
- Take concerns and questions seriously.
  - *Always stay even-keeled. No one gains confidence in a leader that over-reacts.*
  - *Hopefully you are already out-in-front but if not, investigate.*
  - *Respond timely and don't make board members have to continuously remind you or bring the same thing up.*
  - *If there is an issue that requires a certain amount of time to determine or resolve, then share that information and be sure to follow-up.*
  - *Don't minimize questions or issues.*
  - *When a board member asks a question or has a concern, the answer or follow-up should be provided to the full board through one of the communication methods. Individual board members should not be privy to information other members do not have.*

# Communication Methods – What, When, How Much

- Share what board members need to fulfill their responsibilities to the school and community. Don't ramble and get into the weeds unless there is a good reason. Sometimes giving too much information creates problems.
- If an incident or issue occurs, let your board members know by calling them or emailing them same day. You do not build trust if board members are hearing information on the news or in the public before you tell them yourself. **Same is true for staff SVSU.**
- Rumors, even if not true, are treated the same way. Get the correct information to board members. This builds trust with the board and also gives them information to counter what they hear.
- It is also a good idea to keep your message/information to board members, staff, and parents consistent.

# Communication Methods – What, When, How Much

- Lastly – and this is a form of communication and trust with board members. Requirements, communication, and documentation required by SVSU, MDE, Civil Rights, or other agencies should be handled accurately and timely.

*EXAMPLE: SVSU's submission requirements have timelines of which school board's receive an annual report of compliance.*



# Board Agendas

- There should be an established, accepted process for board agenda development agreed upon by the board and administrator.
- That process should include:
  - *Administrator setting an agenda with the board president.*
  - *Agenda and all necessary board materials should be sent out in advance for review. **EXAMPLE:** Not a good idea to send information on a Friday before a Monday meeting expecting board members to read over the weekend. Give more lead time.*

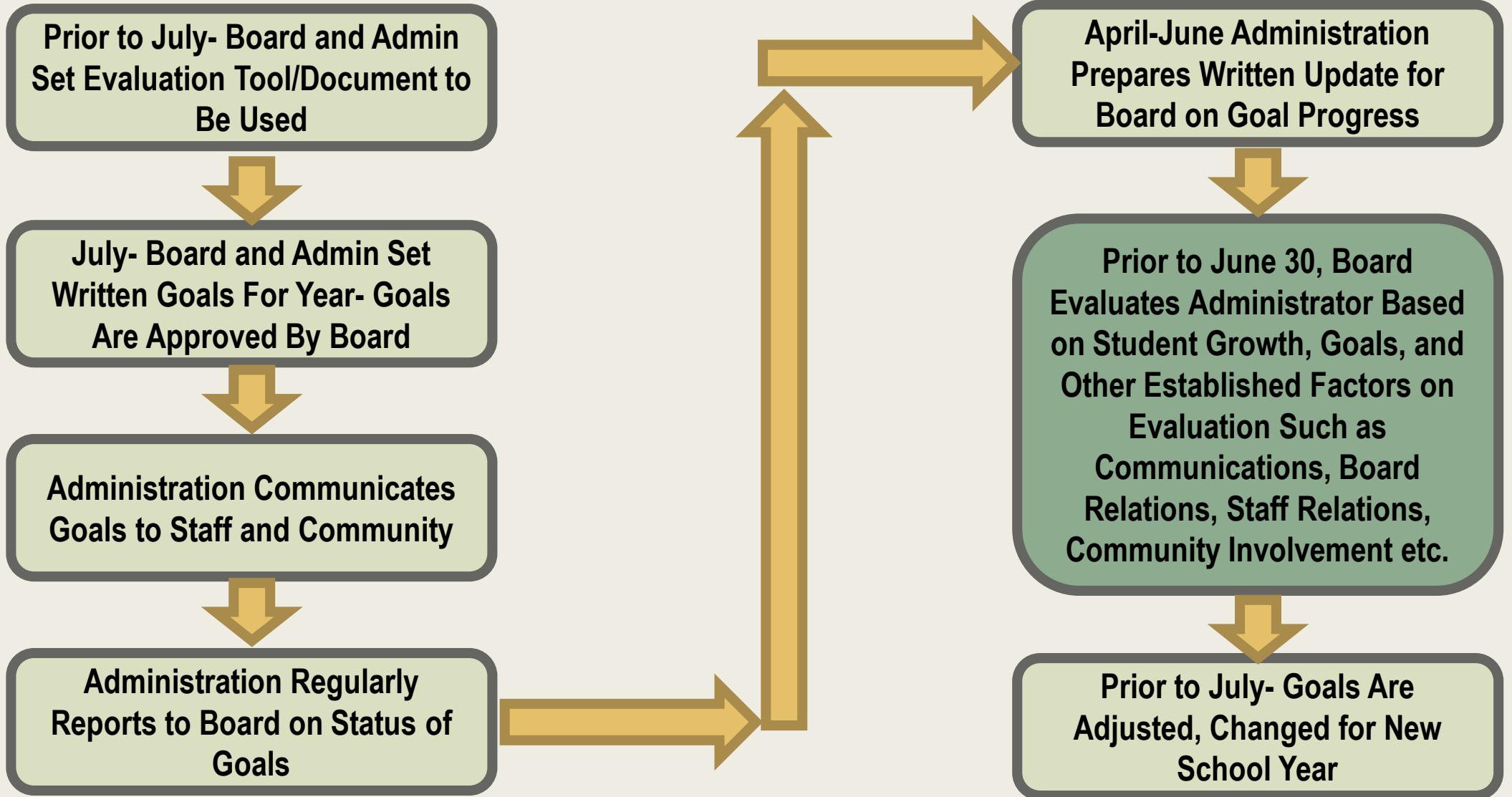
# Board Agendas

- On major or complicated decisions needing approval, give board members an update in the “Weekly Update.”
  - *EXAMPLE: Inform them that in a month or two the Academy might be able to refinance the building loan, which could free up funding for other facility needs. Give them the pros and cons. Ask them to think about what they would like. Then discuss at a meeting or more.*
- Avoid last minute agenda adds. Even items that may seem to be a necessary late add can be communicated:
  - *EXAMPLE: Board meeting is next Tuesday and a bid for plumbing work on the building will not be accepted until Tuesday morning. Add the agenda item with the information minus the bid and let board members know the bids will be available at the meeting.*

# Goal Setting and Implementation

- Just as with staff and parents, it is important that administrators and school boards have established practices and processes that are followed. One important area for this is setting goals.
- Setting effective goals, measuring goal performance, and adjusting strategies for achieving goals:
  - *Is another method to establish positive board relations as there is agreement for the direction of the school.*
  - *Provides clearly established criteria for administrator evaluations.*
  - *Provides a clearly defined path for staff and parents on the focus of the school.*
  - *As with everything, follow-through is critical.*

# Goal Process



# Community/School Recognition and Involvement

- Invite board members to school and community events and meetings.
- Always be sure to introduce board members who have taken the time to attend.
- If there are many different events, provide school board members with dates and times or even a calendar if possible. Encourage board members to attend – parents and staff want to see them and so do you.
- If there are community events, meetings, or dinners that occur on a regular basis such as annually, quarterly etc., rotate inviting different board members so everyone has a chance to participate.
- Encourage board professional development whenever available.

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Questions?