

Role of the Academic Excellence Committee¹

Duties

The main purpose of the Academic Excellence Committee is to measure the academic results of the organization against the goals laid out in the organization's charter, accountability plan, and annual CEO goals. In one sense, the Academic Excellence Committee is similar to the Finance Committee: both exist to monitor performance against stated goals. For the Finance Committee, this means measuring financial results against the budgeted goals. For the Academic Excellence Committee, this means measuring organizational outcomes against stated goals for metrics such as:

- Performance on state tests
- Performance on nationally-normed standardized tests (e.g., the TerraNova, SAT 10, etc.)
- Performance on interim assessments (e.g., Achievement Network tests, the STEP, the DIBELS, or interim assessments created by the school)
- Attendance
- Surveys of family or staff satisfaction
- Student and staff retention

The overall role of the Academic Excellence Committee is to ensure that:

- The board and CEO have a clear and shared definition of “academic excellence” for the organization. (It should be written down and understood by all trustees.)
- The board and CEO have a clear and shared sense of how well the organization is currently performing in reaching that definition of excellence.
- The board and CEO agree on what the next steps the organization will take in order to reach that goal of excellence.
- All trustees understand the promises in the charter and accountability plan and understand how well the organization is currently performing against those promises.
- All trustees understand what standardized assessments the school administers, what each one assesses, when each one is administered, and how the data from each is used to inform teaching and programmatic changes.
- The board and CEO have a clear and structured process for updating the board on the organization's performance on key academic outcomes on a regular basis (at least four times per year).

¹ See also the Job Description for the Academic Excellence Committee

- When academic-outcome data is presented to the board, it is presented in a comparative context (e.g., against comparables of how the organization has performed in the past, how other schools in the area have performed, and how other high performing schools have performed) so that trustees can assess the organization’s overall strength of performance meaningfully.
- Work with CEO to provide board training, as necessary, to understand how the organization is achieving the board approved goals.

	CEO Role	Committee Role
Goal Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop goals/timeline for reporting on progress towards academic goals and propose them to the committee for discussion and feedback • Present finalized goals/reporting timeline to the full board for approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review CEO’s proposed goals/reporting timeline • Ask questions to ensure that the goals are (1) ambitious and (2) achievable. (These judgments are made relative to the organization’s charter promises, other schools’ performances, the organization’s own past performance.) • Recommend finalized goals/reporting timeline to the full board for approval; ensure that all trustees understand goals
Progress Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the committee with data to assess progress towards goals on the agreed upon timeline • Present updates on data to full board on agreed upon timeline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review data to assess progress towards goals on agreed-upon timeline • Ask probing questions to better understand the data and help the CEO to be thoughtful about the data • Help CEO to frame data for presentation to the full board
Instructional Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select and implement curricula, training, and materials necessary for successful instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sounding board for CEO’s ideas on how to improve instructional practices and curricula based on student performance data
Staff Oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire and train all staff • Oversee and evaluate all staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that CEO has created and implemented staff evaluation and feedback procedures • Monitor results through annual/biannual staff surveys and through staff retention data

What the Academic Excellence Committee Should Not Do

One of the biggest pitfalls for Academic Excellence Committees is to engage over *inputs*—the means by which the organization pursues its mission—rather than *outcomes*—the objective data used to assess how well the organization is meeting its mission. Inputs are management level issues, which should be handled by the CEO. Outcomes are what the board should be focused on and governing towards. The best Academic Excellence Committees help CEOs set clear goals for the year of outcomes that are related to the mission and then set up checkpoints throughout the year (likely two to four), at which they meet with the CEO to monitor progress towards those goals.

Other activities Academic Excellence Committees should NOT be involved in:

- Evaluating teachers
- Selecting, designing, or reviewing the quality of curricula
- Planning professional development for teachers
- Interacting with teachers or other staff members on a regular basis (i.e., daily or weekly)
- Interacting with families or students on a regular basis (i.e., daily or weekly)
- Presenting themselves as an outlet for staff, family, or student complaints or concerns that have not first been formally addressed to the CEO

Committee Membership

While it can be useful for some members of the Academic Excellence Committee to have a background in education, it is by no means necessary in order to be an effective committee member. Many effective Academic Excellence Committees do not have educators on the committee. We find that the key functions of the committee—helping the CEO to set ambitious goals and then monitoring data to assess progress towards those goals—are often well met by people with strong analytical skills; these people need not be educators.

What questions should the committee be asking?

- What is the ultimate goal of our organization? (must be measurable)
- How we will know, on an annual basis, that our students are making progress towards this goal?
- How will we know during the course of the year that our students are making progress towards our annual goals?
- When will the board receive updates on students' academic progress this year?
- What data will the board receive at each of these check-in points?
- What results does the CEO expect to see at each check-in point that would tell us we are on track to meet our annual goals?
- Is there an evaluation/feedback process in place for all staff members under which they receive a formal written evaluation, based on clear criteria, at least once per year?
- In addition, see the list of questions in the “Smart Questions about Assessment Data” document, as well.