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## Gaining Community Trust with Solid Board Governance

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## **It All Starts with Board Governance**

When Dr. Curtis Jones joined Bibb County School District (<http://www.bcsdk12.net/>) in April 2015, spent his first month visiting area schools and interacting with community members to learn about what was going right, and to hear their suggestions for improving the district. He found that the community cared deeply about their students, and wanted to ensure that they could trust their schools with providing them quality education in a secure environment.

“The community, in some ways, said, ‘We just need to see the school board do better,’” said Dr. Jones.

With the help of Simbli, he set out to improve board governance by aligning the district’s strategic plan and policies, improving the way the board conducted meetings, and conducting regular evaluations to ensure that he and the board were on track to carry out their goals.

## **Increasing Accountability and Alignment**

Dr. Jones' began to address the governance challenge by creating a culture of accountability for everyone in the school system – from the board down to the student. And he began with the district's strategic plan (<https://eboardsolutions.com/simbli-board-governance-software/strategic-planning-software/>).

“What we did at the school level and the district level was we worked on our strategic plan,” he said. “The idea was, ‘How can you improve, and how do you get everybody aligned?’”

They found that alignment with the help of Simbli.

“For the first time,” said Dr. Jones, “our schools were able to put in place continuous improvement plans that had the same goal areas and the same objectives.”

## Meetings: Not Just a Time to Get Together

Dr. Jones also set out to ensure that the board ran their meetings (<https://eboardsolutions.com/simbli-board-governance-software/board-meeting-management-software/>) in the most efficient, effective way possible. With Simbli, they aligned their meetings with their strategic plan to ensure that every issue discussed, and every action item assigned moved the closer to achieving their goals.

“When I meet once a month with my leadership team, we all come together and we use Simbli to set the agenda,” said Dr. Jones. “We’re able to tie those agenda items to items in our strategic plan.”

Bibb County also uses Simbli to help them better collaborate with the community.

“We’ve taken our school council meetings and put them inside Simbli,” said Dr. Jones. “So, if we want to partner with the community – which is one of our strategic goals – we can show how that happens at every school.”

Dr. Jones is thrilled to be able to prove to the district and the community the value of board meetings and how they are instrumental in refining and supporting their strategic plan.

“We’re very excited about how we now show that meetings just aren’t a time to get together,” he said.

“They’re a time to improve upon our plan, and to put boots on the ground to make it work.”

## Aligning Policies for a Reliable Organization

Building trust in the community means being viewed as a “reliable organization,” notes Dr. Jones. Part of being reliable, he adds, is ensuring that you have core processes you can implement with fidelity. This means not only aligning the district strategic plan with Georgia law and the Georgia State Board of Education rules, but ensuring that policies (<https://eboardsolutions.com/simbli-board-governance-software/board-policy-management-software/>) are aligned, as well.

“We have a person on staff who works with our policies to make sure that whatever we’re doing inside our strategic plan is supported by the policy,” said Dr. Jones. “Simbli is one way for us to do that because we now have rules, policies and regulations that apply to everyone, and they’re in the system for people to go see.”

## Staying on Track with Evaluations

Dr. Jones believes that both self-evaluations (<https://eboardsolutions.com/simbli-board-governance-software/board-performance-evaluation-software/>) and superintendent evaluations are important tools for strong governance, and has seen the difference they’ve made at Bibb County.

“Part of the work that our school board has done to improve in its area of governance has been to conduct a self-evaluation,” he said. With the help of the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA), board members were trained on how to use the evaluation tool.

“What we’ve been able to do is take that document and implement it inside Simbli so that it’s there, available for board members,” said Dr. Jones. “We’re able to email it to them, they can complete it on their own. Then we can pull that information back in and once we complete it, we have it for our records and can use it to build action plans for the board.”

The same thing is true of the superintendent’s evaluation, he added. The document is sent to board members so they can complete it on their own. After they come back together to compare notes, Dr. Jones receives the evaluation.

“I think in some ways, it helps the board recognize that the superintendent’s evaluation is important,” he said.

## From Quality to Distinguished Board

Due to their hard work and dedication, the Bibb County Board was recognized by GSBA as a Distinguished Board in 2016, advancing from a Quality Board in 2015.

“Our board wanted to be able to demonstrate to the public that they were doing a better job in governance,” said Dr. Jones. “They’ve demonstrated they’re willing to put in extra time, to learn, and to implement what they’ve learned.”

Dr. Jones knows that change doesn’t come easily, and he’s encouraged by how far the school system has come in such a short time.

“When I look at the work we’re doing with the superintendent’s evaluation, the self-assessment, policies and regulations, and aligning of our strategic plan, we’re light years ahead of where I thought we would be.”

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