Virginia Department of Education

SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION SYSTEM

Research Synthesis of Virginia Superintendent Evaluation Competencies and Standards

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

Synthesis on Extant Research Related to Virginia Superintendent Evaluation Standards

In the current political climate, where accountability and standards-based reform represent the educational centerpiece, a renewed interest has emerged in superintendent evaluation as a factor in school improvement. The purpose of this research report is to synthesize what the research says about what constitutes superintendent effectiveness so as to clarify the role, expectations, and quality performance of superintendents. A fair and rigorous superintendent evaluation system should consist of realistic and research-informed performance standards in order to ensure the accuracy and usefulness of superintendent performance and evaluation feedback. Designing a solid superintendent evaluation system necessarily starts with the alignment between it and the research findings of effective superintendents.

In order to document superintendent effectiveness that is based on a comprehensive conception of the job expectations for superintendents, performance standards are used to collect and present data. The ultimate goal of such performance standards is to support the continuous growth and development of each superintendent by monitoring, analyzing, and applying pertinent data compiled within a system of meaningful feedback. Quality performance standards can provide sufficient detail and accuracy so that both superintendents and evaluators understand the full range of superintendent performance and identify areas for professional improvement. This report provides an empirical review of relevant research on superintendent effectiveness that will serve as a research base for Virginia to consider while developing performance standards to evaluate school superintendents.

Fulfilling the superintendency is a complex and multi-faceted job and, therefore, defining "effectiveness" for the position is equally complex. Researchers have developed different criteria for superintendents. For instance, a study conducted by Sclanfani surveyed 1,800 superintendents about the attributes desired and perceived to be important.[1] Eight performance areas containing 52 themes emerged from the data: climate; division finances; development of an effective curriculum; creation of programs of continuous improvement; management of division operations; delivery of an effective means of instruction; building strong local, state, and national support for education; conducting and using research in problem solving and program planning.

Conversely, a study by Haughland examined the professional competencies and skills noted as important for superintendents as perceived by school board members and superintendents.[2] The study generated two lists of competencies and they were ranked in order from the most important to the least important:

School Board Members' List	Superintendents' List
Personnel management	Superintendent/board relations
School finance	Personnel management
Curriculum development	Public relations
Accomplishing board's goals	School finance
Superintendent/board relations	Accomplishing board's goals
Public relations	Curriculum development
Policy formulation	Policy formulation
School construction	School construction
Collective negotiations	Collective negotiation

In an effort to define the profession, American Association for School Administrators (AASA) established a commission that developed a set of eight professional standards for superintendents: leadership and division culture; policy and governance; communications and community relations; organizational management; curriculum planning and development; instructional management; human resource management; value and ethics of leadership.[3] A thorough review of extant literature of superintendent effectiveness has reinforced that a superintendent's performance matters in the following seven domains:

- Policy and governance
- Planning and assessment
- Instructional leadership
- Organizational leadership
- Communications and community relations
- Professionalism
- Student academic progress

This report will provide the research evidence behind each of the seven performance standards.

SECTION 2

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXTANT RESEARCH RELATED TO EACH SUPERINTENDENT PERFORMANCE STANDARD

Policy and Governance

One of the major functions of superintendents is to gather and present data so that school board members can make intelligent policy decisions. Cooper et al. defined policy as "a political process where needs, goals, and intentions are translated into a set of objectives, laws, policies, and programs, which in turn affect resource allocations, actions, and outputs, which are the basis for evaluation, reforms, and new policies."[4] Federal, state, and local levels of government, as well as court decisions, exercise varying degrees of authority over public schools. However, as policies move from national to state, and from state to local levels of governance, descriptions increase in degree of specificity and discretion.[5] Effective superintendents have the expertise to not only relate local policy to state and federal regulations and requirements, but also to understand the dynamics of community and school board relations and formulate policies for external and internal programs.

Policy

Richardson noted that solid policies have many positive influences on the school division. For instance, policy ensures that school divisions: (a) create and sustain a clear vision; (b) explicitly address fundamental values; (c) focus on outcomes; (d) force forward thinking; (e) separate large issues from small; (f) clarify lines of responsibility; and (g) provide leverage and efficiency.[6] Policy establishes both expectations and constraints for members of a school division and serves the following purposes:[7]

- Setting division goals and objectives;
- Determining the recipients of division educational services;
- Determining the amount of investments in division operations;
- Allocating resources to and among division sub-units;
- Determining the means by which division personnel will deliver services.

Superintendents play a critical role in policy development by providing board members with recommendations and supporting information. Leithwood has argued for central policy initiatives that define expected outcomes while simultaneously allowing schools to develop the learning capacity to determine their own processes and implementation strategies.[8] Shannon and Bylsma found that successful school divisions not only develop and implement policies that

promote equity and excellence, they also review and revise these policies and strategies to ensure coherence among programs and practices linked to division goals.[9]

Local school divisions are uniquely American institutions. While the full responsibility for public education is delegated to the states, a considerable amount of this responsibility rests in most states with local boards of education and with the school leaders that they appoint and govern.[10] School divisions formulate policy, as well as interpret and implement federal and state policy, in ways that reinforce and support a vision for improving teaching and learning. High-performing school divisions establish coherence by linking policy and operations. Programs and practices are adopted or implemented in relation to their support of the vision.[11] During the last couple of decades, however, states have become increasingly prominent in policymaking and are now exercising more guidance on public education; nevertheless, local school boards that function as a bridge between the states and the individual schools not only interpret and mediate state policies and initiatives, but also have the authority to make division-based policies. Therefore, local policies and priorities have important impact on the selection and implementation of reforms, and on the improvement of overall academic performance.[12]

Relationship with school board

One of the key responsibilities of superintendents is establishing and maintaining an effective and positive relationship with their boards of education.[13] The relationship between the superintendent and the board of education in a school division has far-reaching implications on the quality of the division's educational program.[14] In divisions with high levels of student achievement, the local board of education is aligned with and supports the goals for achievement and instruction.[15] Negative superintendent-board relations often reduce division effectiveness and thwart school reform by: (a) causing instability and low morale; (b) lowering program quality; (c) curtaining long-range planning; and (d) causing high rates of administrator turnover.[16]

Understanding the link between communities and schools in a democratic society, as well as understanding the political dynamics between school board members and division chief executive officers, is essential to effective leadership. Superintendents need to understand that politics is ultimately a process through which individuals and groups can reconcile their interest.[17] Superintendents work with elected officials, special interest groups, and board of education members, and therefore need to have political acumen and skills to make decisions, to resolve differences, to allocate funds in accordance with educational values, and to generate voter support for school issues. As the United States becomes more ethnically and racially diverse, interest group activity and political conflict have escalated. These circumstances compel superintendents to understand the relationship between society and schools, as well as know how to respond to expectations that can be contradictory.[18]

Researchers in educational leadership have started to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of the community politics, especially the political configurations of boards of education and superintendent roles. McCarty and Ramsey defined four types of community power structures and described how they align with political configurations of board of education members and superintendent roles.

Influence of community and board power structures on superintendent roles[19]

Community Power Structure	School Board	Role of the Superintendent
Dominated: The community power structure is controlled by a few individuals at the apex of the hierarchy and is "top down" ("elite" power model). The decision-making group is likely to be the "economic elite" in the community but also may be derived from religious, ethnic, racial, or political power structures. Opposition to their position is rarely successful.	Dominated: School board members are chosen because their views are congruent with the views and ideology of the dominant group (power elite), and they take advice from community leaders and align with their positions on important issues. Any organized opposition in the community is not strong enough to displace the elite.	Functionary: The superintendent identifies with the dominant group, takes cues from them, and perceives her or his role as that of an administrator who carries out board policies, rather than developing policies. The board selects a superintendent who reflects a willingness to work within this context.
Factional: Several groups holding relatively equal power compete for control over important policy decisions and may coalesce around economic, religious, ethnic, racial, or political power philosophies.	Factional: School board members represent the viewpoints of factions and act in accordance with their view. Voting is more important than discussing issues. If the issue is important, the majority faction always wins. Board elections tend to be hotly contested.	Political strategist: The superintendent must work with the majority, and, when it changes, she or he must align with the emergent majority. The superintendent must be careful not to alienate other factions, as the majority may shift again in the future. She or he takes a middle course on controversial issues.
Pluralistic: Power is contested by interest groups and is dispersed, pluralistic, and diffused. High levels of concern for important issues and active involvement of interest groups in decisions are evident.	Status Congruent: School board members are active in discussing issues but not rigidly bound to one group or position. Members are viewed as equals, and decisions on issues are made in an objective fashion.	Professional Advisor: The superintendent acts as a statesperson, giving professional advice based on research and experience. She or he expresses professional opinions and may propose alternative courses of action in an open and objective fashion.
Inert: Power in communities is latent or endorses the status quo. Radical experimentation may not be acceptable. Power structure tends not to be actively involved in policy decisions.	Sanctioning: Board members hold views congruent with pervasive values and views of the community. They follow the lead of the superintendent on proposals and approve them without question.	Decision Maker: The superintendent initiates action and provides leadership to ensure division effectiveness. The school board "rubber-stamps" her or his proposals. The superintendent provides leadership but is constrained by latent community values that emphasize the status quo.

The findings of a nationwide survey study of the superintendency confirmed that political power structure of the community influences school board behavior and the superintendent role.[20] This study examined how superintendents perceived board of education power configurations and the way they work with board members. Over a nearly 30-year period (1971-2000), superintendents exhibited two dominant roles in working their boards of education: professional advisor (48 percent) and decision maker (49.5 percent). As professional advisors, they were inclined to work collaboratively with boards, but had the political acuity to adapt to changes in board political power configurations. Over a third (36.7 percent) said they shared policy-making responsibilities with boards; in larger divisions often marked by fractious political relations, the tendency to share policy-making responsibilities increased to 45.3 percent. Of the superintendents surveyed,

43 percent said they were responsible for taking the lead in division policy-making activities, and 89 percent said that boards accepted their recommendations 90-100 percent of the time.

Research findings regarding effective superintendency emphasize the importance of communication and good superintendent-board relationships. Researchers have found that superintendent-board relationships should be conceptualized as that of an executive leadership and governance team.[21] A study by Carter, Glass, and Hord found that effective superintendents spend about six hours a week communicating with board members.[22] In another study, based on a survey of 175 superintendents judged nationally by their peers to be outstanding, Glass found that 58 percent of superintendents spent four or more hours a week in direct communication with board members. In addition, 93 percent of surveyed superintendents perceived that they have a collaborative relationship with the school board.[23] There are many activities that can be only accomplished through collaboration between the superintendent and the board of education, including:[24]

- Serving as advocates for the notion that all children can learn;
- Providing educational leadership for the community that focuses on developing a shared vision for schooling, and creating long-range plans through inclusive processes that engage the talents of community citizens, parents, teachers, principals, and interest groups;
- Creating strong linkages with community-based social service organizations and agencies to support families and enhance the capacity of children to learn;
- Formulating divisionwide educational policies and setting annual goals that are tied to the community's vision and student learning;
- Collaboratively developing annual budgets that support the primary purpose of education, student learning;
- Ensuring that school environments are safe and facilitate student learning;
- Providing resources to support effective professional development programs in building the capacity of administrators and teachers to improve student learning.

Planning and Assessment

A prime function of the superintendent is to provide planning and direction to the school system. This includes functions ranging from curriculum and instruction to athletic programs to financial management.[25] In order to be successful in these functions, the school division leaders must possess the following qualities: goal-setting, initiative, drive, high expectations, and accountability.[26] More than any other employee, the superintendent must constantly be concerned with systemwide missions and goals while constantly working to motivate the constituents to accept and to be committed to those missions and goals. The superintendent strives to pull the system together in a synergic effort, rather than letting it operate as individual entities with missions and goals that may not support, and may even distract from, systemwide concerns.[27]

Data-driven decision-making

In the current context of performance standards and accountability, instructional leaders know they must develop the skills to collect and use data from a variety of sources to inform school improvement decision. They work with parents, school board members, media, and other interested groups in the community to share and interpret achievement results about what students are learning, areas that need improvement, and plans for improvement efforts. They disaggregate achievement data and get detailed, ongoing information about student performance.[28]

Cawelti and Protheroe conducted a study to examine four school divisions that serve significant numbers of students from low-income families and have made substantial progress in narrowing the achievement on standardized test scores.[29] A central finding of this study is that in order to make large achievement gains, an extensive effort is necessary in making detailed analyses of student learning data and providing immediate and appropriate corrective instruction for individual students based on that data.

An effective superintendent must be a leader of data-driven practice: he/she uses student achievement data to identify gaps in learning, examine instructional practice, and inform future curricular and instructional decision-making.[30] Successful superintendents collect quality data to inform decision-making. They use solid baseline data to set goals that are rigorous yet attainable, align these goals with the division's existing plans and initiatives (e.g., special education, professional development), and include meaningful success/progress indicators and annual performance targets to review and revise goals as reform is implemented.[31] The division leaders commit the division to continuous improvement based on tangible evidence of improved student learning. To do this, the leaders must: (a) communicate clear priorities; (b) build progress monitoring tools into the routine process of each school in the division to collect data to determine the effects of division decision-making on teaching, student learning, and the personnel involved; and (c) establish a division culture in which staff pay attention to what data say about learning and achievement, and they are invested in realizing their potential.[32]

Strategic planning

Successful educational leaders respond proactively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work.[33] Also, superintendents must be global thinkers who have a strong grasp of the external changes facing education.[34] Demographics, family structure, technologies, economic and market forces, medical and health issues, religious beliefs, and global issues of trade, war, terrorism, and international cooperation are part of a superintendent's knowledge, based in helping school boards establish board policy.[35] Hoyle et al. stated that superintendents should "demonstrate an awareness of global issues and a reasoned understanding of major historical, philosophical, ethical, social political, and economic influences on education in a democratic society that affect executive leadership, schools, staff, and all students."[36]

Risk-taking is a key factor in successful leadership. Most management and leadership literature advocates that risk-taking is a necessity of leadership. In educational leadership, it is important

for leaders to support innovation and risk-taking as well.[37] Research shows, however, that superintendents are not generally risk-takers. Carter, Glass, and Hord stated that superintendents "regard themselves as 'hands on' managers more than visionary executives constantly seeking alternative ways in which to make their school organization more effective. The ingrained adage 'let's not reinvent the wheel' often appears to create a climate militating against creativity and risk-taking."[38]

The superintendent is in a vital leadership position and serves as the catalyst for orchestrating change for continuous improvement across the division.[39] School leaders need to be knowledgeable about planning processes; they also need to be able to monitor initiatives and take corrective action.[40] Leithwood and Riehl identified a core set of leadership practices that form the basics of successful leadership and are valuable in almost all educational contexts. One of these core practices is *setting directions.* Setting directions is a process that involves developing a collective vision of the future that focuses, inspires, and sustains goal achievement efforts over time. In this regard, division leaders identify, articulate, and endorse visions of exemplary instructional practices and model those beliefs in decision-making.[41] According to the literature on leadership success, Leithwood and Riehl found that the practices of setting directions include:[42]

- **Identifying and articulating a vision.** Effective educational leaders develop or endorse visions that embody the best thinking about teaching and learning. School leaders inspire others to reach for ambitious goals.
- **Creating shared meanings.** Because people usually base their actions on how they understand things, effective leaders help to create shared meanings and understandings to support the school/division's vision. Effectiveness of the school division is enhanced when both internal members and the broader community share clear understandings about students, learning, and schooling.
- **Creating high performance expectations.** Effective leaders convey their expectation for quality and high performance. They help others see the challenging nature of the goals being pursued. They sharpen perceptions of the gap between what the division aspires to, and what is presently being accomplished. Effective expressions of high expectations help people see that what is being expected is in fact possible.
- **Fostering the acceptance of group goals.** Effective educational leaders promote cooperation and assist others to work together toward common goals. In the past, teachers have often worked under conditions of relative autonomy, but new models of schools as professional learning communities emphasize the importance of shared goals and effort.
- **Monitoring organizational performance.** Effective leaders assess how well the division is performing along multiple indicators and use that information as goals are developed and reviewed. This requires skills of gathering and interpreting information, as well as a habit of inquiry and reflection. Successful leaders ask critical and constructive questions, emphasize the use of systematic evidence, and encourage careful monitoring of both teaching and student progress.
- **Communicating.** Skillful leaders focus attention on key aspects of the school/division's vision and communicate the vision clearly and convincingly. They invite interchange with multiple stakeholders through participatory communication strategies. They frame issues in ways that will lead to productive discourse and decision-making.

Instructional programs

Although in the past superintendents may have been viewed as managers of complex bureaucracies rather than instructional leaders, the move toward instructional accountability of superintendents is not without merit or empirical evidence.[43] Superintendents have both a legal and a moral responsibility to ensure that schools achieve a high standard of excellence. The position of superintendents within division hierarchies suggests their ability to influence the focus and direction of the division organization. Successful innovations and school improvements often have central office support.[44] Hord asserted that the superintendents are in the most expedient position to support instructional improvement within the division.[45] Research indicates that superintendents use their bureaucratic positions in the formal organization to improve instruction through staff selection, principal supervision, instructional goal-setting and monitoring, financial planning, and consultative management practices.[46] Research findings indicate that superintendents of effective school divisions exhibit high levels of involvement in instructional matters and use managerial levers at their disposal to influence the behavior of principals and teachers who are more directly involved in improving classroom teaching and student learning.[47]

Accountability systems implemented by state legislators have driven the need for strategic planning in curriculum and instruction. Hoyle et al stated that:

> "The increasingly complex environment in which public schools are embedded is radically changing the work of school administrators and how they lead. For example, changing characteristics of the student population, including differences in cultures, disabilities, and socioeconomic status as well as learning capacities, are increasingly demanding interagency collaboration for the delivery of services to families and children. In addition, reform initiatives, including standards, achievement benchmarks, the application of technology to learning and teaching, and new program requirements, policies, and mandates, are changing the landscape of school and division leadership and influencing how leadership roles must be defined."[48]

Curriculum alignment is a form of strategic planning that requires constant monitoring of student progress and participation from teachers to identify goals and ensure their correct sequencing in the instructional program. Review of literature suggests that instructional capacity of a school division is built and maintained when the superintendent, principals, and teachers do the following:[49]

- Understand the core technology of teaching and learning, particularly effective models of teaching;
- Engage in frequent conversations about teaching and learning;
- Create coherence by aligning curriculum, instruction, and standards;
- Use multiple sources of student assessment data; and
- Make adult learning a priority by providing relevant professional development.

Resource allocation

As resources decline and accountability demands increase, no superintendent can afford to depend on merely handling situations after they arise. Plans that address how resources will be used and what personnel will be involved are needed to ensure that expenditure of time and money are optimized in handling possible but unexpected situations.[50] In divisions with higher levels of student achievement, the superintendents ensure that the necessary resources (including time, money, personnel, and materials) are allocated to accomplish the division's goals. This can mean cutting back, or dropping, initiatives that are not aligned with a division's goals for achievement and instruction.[51] For instance, Waters and Marzano found that a meaningful commitment of funding should be dedicated to professional development of teachers and principals, which should be focused on building the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies teachers and principals need to accomplish a division's goals.[52] Effective division leaders make creative use of all resources to support school improvement. To make time for teachers to work together, instructional leaders come up with strategies to add to, borrow from, or rearrange daily schedules. Their focus on improving learning drives every conversation about budget development and every decision about how to use existing resources.[53]

A leader is the chief cheerleader and communicator for a shared strategic plan. In addition, leaders must use their administrative skills to create the resources and structures needed to implement the plan. Herman recommends the following action plan steps to implement a vision or strategic plan:[54]

- Identify all tasks;
- Sequence the tasks;
- Identify who is responsible for each task;
- Identify needed resources for each objective; and
- State the measurement that will be used to determine whether the objective has been achieved.

Instructional Leadership

Leithwood and Riehl summarized several research-based conclusions about successful leadership, concluding that "leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction."[55] Empirical findings and case study observations of leaders in high-performing schools indicate that leaders influence student learning directly by coalescing and supporting teacher efforts to achieve high expectations for student learning.[56]

Case studies of exceptional schools, especially those that succeed beyond expectations, provide detailed portraits of leadership. These studies indicate that school leaders influence learning primarily by galvanizing efforts around ambitious goals and establishing conditions that support teachers and that help students succeed.[57] Large-scale quantitative studies conclude that the effects of leadership on student achievement are small, accounting for only about three to five percent of the variation; however, they also indicate that leadership effects appear to be mostly

indirect. In other words, leaders influence student learning through promoting vision and goals and through ensuring that resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well.[58]

Vision

A superintendent who is an effective instructional leader is able to: (a) identify or develop and articulate achievable goals; (b) motivate a leadership team, especially principals, to work toward a common goal; (c) change and enhance existing structures to foster the achievement of goals; (d) invest in human and physical resources; and (e) monitor through evaluating the success of the interventions.[59] Educational reform and innovation is impossible without visionary leadership by superintendents. Effective superintendents create a vision that focuses on the core of any schooling system—teaching and learning—and communicate the vision through continual communication with principals.

A superintendent, first and foremost, must be able to foresee the possibilities for the organization and develop a cohesive, clearly-articulated vision. Zander and Zander stated that "a vision becomes a framework for possibility."[60] Nanus defined vision as "a realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization. It is an articulation of a destination toward which the organization should aim, a future that in important ways is better, more successful, or more desirable for the organization than is present."[61] There are three dimensions of the visioning process that an effective visionary leader must possess:[62]

- The ability to see beyond the status quo;
- The ability to see a better future; and
- The ability to align procedures to institutionalize the vision.

When forging a vision, the superintendent should:[63]

- Develop teams representing all stakeholders;
- Listen for the common ground;
- Insist on a consistent direction that reflects the core vision; and
- Commit the vision to writing.

Leithwood and Riehl stated that vision is a central part of direction setting. Value-laden visions lead to commitment on the part of organizational members and prompt continual professional development.[64] Leithwood and Riehl also suggested that visioning could be enhanced by three additional aspects of leadership practice:

- Monitoring organizational performance;
- Communicating key aspects of the vision meaningfully and convincingly; and
- Working effectively with critical representatives from the organization.

A superintendent does not create the division vision alone—all stakeholders must have an opportunity to have input. Because people support what they help create, the more people involved in the process, the better the chance of success at achieving this vision.[65] Effective instructional leadership requires a clear instructional vision, but good visions never implement

themselves. Superintendents are dependent on principals and teachers to actually carry out the vision and are most successful when they engender commitment from the staff.[66] They do this by providing resources, buffering staff from outside meddling, being visible, engaging others in conversations about instruction, empowering collaborative risk taking, and recognizing and celebrating accomplishments.

Program management

Research has indicated that the superintendent is an essential environmental factor to the effective curriculum delivery.[67] The role of the superintendent is usually portrayed as primarily managerial in nature. Cuban asserts that most superintendents adopt, and in fact, are pressured into these managerial orientations where "doing things right" takes priority over "doing the right things."[68] In fact, effective superintendents embrace their functions as the primary instructional leader for their divisions, prioritizing student achievement and effective instructional practices as the foremost goals of the division.[69] Effective leaders who achieve educational priorities are primarily characterized as people who influence the motivations and actions of others to achieve shared goals. Superintendents play a significant role in positively influencing motivations and actions toward successful curriculum delivery. Petersen et al. found that teachers perceive a significant relationship among superintendent instructional leadership, the creation of instructional capacity at the division and school level, and teacher professional development and instructional practices.[70] There are several supportive factors that the superintendent contributes to the improvement in curriculum delivery:[71]

- Possessing and articulating a vision of what the desired outcomes are and what change will look like;
- Establishing a shared vision among leadership reflecting stakeholder needs and concerns, especially in the area of curriculum;
- Identifying strategies to accomplish the vision and enabling individuals to attain these goals; and
- Conducting ongoing evaluation and improvement through formal and informal feedback.

Moreover, the superintendent plays an active role in evaluating the implementation of division instructional programming: he/she clearly and regularly communicates expectations for learning to faculty, monitors division progress toward student achievement goals, and initiates professional development that meets the specific needs of the division.[72] A study by Morgan and Peterson examined five purposefully selected superintendents who had been recognized as effective instructional leaders.[73] They found that principals and school board members particularly value their superintendent's role in the following instructional areas:

- Providing vision for instruction by planning for instruction and collaboratively developing goals;
- Evaluating and monitoring instruction;
- Promoting instruction by developing instructional leaders; and
- Communicating instructional expectations to staff and community.

Findings revealed statistically significant differences in the perceptions of principals and school board members between the selected and randomly chosen divisions. The principals and school board members from selected divisions ranked their superintendents high in all of the instructional areas. These findings are supported by many other studies, which examine superintendents in effective schools with high student achievement to identify characteristics of effective instructional leaders.[74] For instance, Murphy and Hallinger conducted a study to describe leadership practices in Instructionally Effective School Divisions, which demonstrated a high level of overall student achievement across subject areas, high growth and achievement over time, and consistent achievement across all sub-populations of students. They found that superintendents in these divisions shared common practices in their instructional leadership, including:

- Establishing student goals;
- Staffing of quality principals and direct involvement in providing guidance to principals to make them effective instructional leaders;
- Supervising and evaluating staff;
- Establishing the division focus on curriculum and instruction; and
- Monitoring curriculum and instruction.

In another study, Petersen collected data from superintendents, school boards, and principals in five California divisions that had the largest percentile growth on student assessment. He found five themes consistent among these division's instructionally focused-superintendents,[75] which were the superintendents' abilities to:

- Create an instructionally-oriented vision and communicate this vision throughout the school division;
- Demonstrate high visibility;
- Illustrate the importance of teaching and learning through professional development and shared decision-making;
- Receive school board support; and
- Use assessment and evaluation to determine if the division's school performance is meeting articulated instructional expectations and goals.

Staff development

Effective superintendents create conditions that encourage professional learning communities. Research supports the notion that schools that function as learning communities produce higher levels of student learning. A professional learning community is an environment characterized by mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as educators collaborate together to accomplish what they cannot accomplish individually.[76] In a study of first- and second-year teachers, Moore-Johnson found that this new generation of teachers wants to be well paid in their profession, seeks a variety of roles and opportunities for advancement, and desires to collaborate and find support within a professional community. Consequently, creating and sustaining a culture of support appears essential to attract and keep the best and brightest new teachers.[77]

Developing teachers involves building the capacity of those within the school and using their strengths to support the school's efforts.[78] Additionally, Leithwood and colleagues identified specific factors important in building teacher capacity, including offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support, and providing best practice models.[79] Effective administrators provide the time, resources, and structure for meaningful professional development and recognize the teacher leadership within the building.[80] Professional development opportunities must be frequent, high quality, and pertinent to the vision and goals.[81]

Evidence indicates that teachers who receive substantial high quality professional development can help students achieve more.[82] High quality professional development refers to a focus on content and pedagogy, in-depth active learning, extended duration, and collective participation.[83] Based on the findings of one meta-analysis, teachers who received substantial professional development (49 hours) boosted their students' achievement by 21 percentile points; this effect size was fairly consistent across all content areas.[84] This research suggests that for professional development to support an increase in student learning outcomes, sufficient time must be coupled with high quality development.

Effective school leaders "combat teacher isolation, closed doors, negativism, defeatism and teacher resistance" and they build a sense of school community.[85] Current literature revealed that professional learning communities both support positive outcomes in teacher improvement and promote increased student learning outcomes.[86] Effective division leaders, superintendents, devote significant time to developing leadership and collaboration among others in their division. Through distributing responsibilities among teachers and staff members other than the principal or themselves, superintendents tacitly but clearly acknowledge that every member of the school community has the potential and right to work as a leader.[87] Distributing leadership in this way goes beyond merely delegating responsibilities for tasks; it provides regular opportunities for everyone in the community to share what they are learning about their own practice. Division staff gradually take on a variety of roles, including coach, facilitator, or participant, to reflect on the purpose and content of the work. A study that investigated superintendents who made a difference in student learning, as measured by standardized tests and/or benchmark assessments, found that superintendents who have a positive impact on student learning do so primarily through the promotion, support, and development of principals as instructional leaders in the following ways:[88]

- They promote instructional leadership.
    - They work with the larger school community to set a vision for high expectations for all students. That means establishing the belief that all children, regardless of race, gender, primary language and socio-economic status, can meet high standards.
    - They communicate to principals the importance of their role as instructional leaders and use various methods to reinforce the message, including face-to-face conversations, exhortations at public meetings, written memos and e-mails.
    - They work with principals to establish a clear definition of what instructional leadership looks like. The definition could include practices as having expertise in instructional strategies and content, use student achievement data to guide instructional decisions, create and supervise professional development for teacher

improved performance, and conduct classroom visits to monitor the implementation of programs. They also tie principal evaluation to the instructional leadership role.

- They support instructional leadership.
    - They make central office staff members see their role as offering support and help to the principals, not the other way around.
    - They reorganize the central office structure and personnel, or introduce a comprehensive training program to ensure that the central office is driven by the goals of supporting principal needs.
    - They realign the work of the central office to support principals by providing tailored support, visiting schools regularly, forming principal peer support groups, reducing paperwork and off-site meetings not directly related to instruction, and providing a confidential coach to help the principal implement his or her instructional leadership plans.

- They develop instructional leadership.
    - They provide training and on-site coaching for principals through connecting expertise in instructional practice with expertise in supervising instruction.
    - They provide tools for using data to make decisions and allocate resources to focus sharply on instruction.

Organizational Leadership

Without excellent management, leadership is not possible—management accomplishes the tasks that leadership envisions and empowers. Effective superintendents understand that they must adopt a balanced blend of leadership and management to function successfully. Contemporary superintendents have multiple responsibilities as administrators of complex educational systems. They must possess skills in program design and evaluation, policy implementation and priority establishment, public relations and collaboration, communication and participatory decision-making, fiscal management and facility planning, just to name a few. Superintendents must ensure that leadership capacity is expanded, throughout a division's schools, to implement and sustain successful reform innovations, while at the same time appropriately distribute fiscal, material, and human resources to ensure continuous student learning. These tasks require a staggering knowledge base and range of organizational management skills.[89]

Environment

A winning division environment is one that is conducive to learning—one that is free from disciplinary problems and that embodies high expectations of student achievement. The ability to shape the culture and climate of a division is essential to a superintendent's success. Willmore stated, "Within all organizations, including school divisions, the *culture* is the way we do things, while the *climate* is the way any organization actually feels when they walk in the door or stay a while."[90] School culture includes norms, values, rituals, assumptions, traditions, artifacts, symbols, and behavior patterns.[91] School culture is determined by its history, artifacts, languages, icons, stories, and the way decisions are made in the community. Schools have

organizational personalities that include organizational styles and human dynamics.[92] Schein stated, "[O]rganizational culture is created by shared experience, but it is the leader who initiates this process by imposing his or her beliefs, values, and assumptions at the outset."[93] Research has supported the notion that school administrators set the tone for creating a culture that enhances teacher morale and student achievement.[94]

Several tools have been created to assess the culture and climate of an organization. One tool is the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ). The OCDQ measures whether a school climate is open and caring, or closed based on teachers' and administrators' assessments of interactions among teachers, and between teachers and administrators. Another measure of culture and climate is the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), that measures the perceptions of staff regarding the leader's ability to effectively communicate tasks, responsibilities, and rules as well as his/her friendliness, trustworthiness, and caring. In addition, Hoy and colleagues developed an instrument widely used to assess school/division climate, which is called Organizational Health Inventory.[95] It assesses seven dimensions:

1. **Instructional integrity:** the freedom of the division to conduct educational programs without extreme scrutiny from community groups with narrow vested interests, and the extent to which teachers feel protected from unreasonable community and parental demands.
2. **Behavior-initiating structure:** whether the school executive makes clear to staff their attitudes and expectations about policy, and standards of performance.
3. **Consideration:** the caring, supportive, and collegial behaviors of the school superintendent.
4. **Principal's/superintendent's influence:** the principal's/superintendent's skills of persuasion and effectiveness in working with superiors but remaining independent in thought and action.
5. **Resource support:** the availability of adequate classroom supplies and instructional materials and the ease of obtaining extra materials.
6. **Morale:** trust, confidence, enthusiasm, and friendliness among staff.
7. **Academic emphasis:** the school's emphasis on high but achievable academic goals for students, provision of a learning environment that is serious, and expectations that students work hard and do well academically.

Personnel management

Superintendent success is dependent upon his/her ability to hire people with the right match of technical knowledge, leadership skill, and ethics. The superintendent demonstrates executive leadership by developing personnel, recruitment, selection, development, and promotion procedures and applying effective staff evaluation models and processes.[96] While recruiting, the superintendents first assess the skills that are needed in the various departments and schools of the division. Recruitment efforts should be in alignment with both the goals of the division and the policies set forth by the board of education. The superintendent should be aware of whether the division has policies that promote hiring from within while seeking diversity from without. If the hiring policies hinder the superintendent's ability to recruit the best candidate, a revision of the policy should occur. In addition, effective superintendents use more than an "interview only"

system to select the best candidate.[97] Effective superintendents are aware that the school system, as a human organization, cannot exceed the capacity of the people in it. So they invest in teacher induction, training, and professional development programs. They are also familiar with the processes of coaching, mentoring, and reflection to guide staff development. In addition, effective superintendents examine the evaluation system of each branch in the division to determine how useful the information provided is to the employee and the supervisor. Furthermore, they know the importance of retaining the best and brightest. To achieve this, they show appreciation for employees, compensate them fairly, give them opportunities for advancement, and allow them to contribute to decision-making.[98]

Hoyle et al. stated that "the notion that the leader, school, and division are only as good as the staff underscores the obligation of leaders to develop people through intellectual stimulation, promotion, and support of those engaged in change and through modeling of shared beliefs."[99] Effective superintendents influence the development of human resources in their division. By focusing principal and teacher evaluation on instructional improvement, superintendents can create powerful learning communities within their division.[100] Leithwood and Riehl explain that the effective practices of developing people include:[101]

- **Offering intellectual stimulation.** Effective leaders encourage reflection, and challenge their staff to examine assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed. They provide information and resources to help people see discrepancies between current and desired practices. They enable teachers and others to understand and gain mastery over the complexities of necessary changes.
- **Providing individualized support.** Most educational improvement requires significant levels of change for the individuals involved. Successful educational leaders show respect for staff and concern about their feelings and needs. Leaders provide incentives and structures to promote change, as well as opportunities for individual learning and appropriate means for monitoring progress toward improvement.
- **Providing an appropriate model.** Effective educational leaders set examples for staff and others to follow that are consistent with the school/division's values and goals. By modeling desired dispositions and actions, leaders enhance others' beliefs about their own capacities and their enthusiasm for change.

Problem-solving

Given the complexity of the superintendent's role and the innumerable decisions that must be made, the skills of problem-identification and problem-solving are especially important. The superintendency is a position fraught with a wide range of problems. As a consequence, an effective superintendent should be a change agent, one who is capable of improving learning and teaching, increasing management efficiency, and effectively responding to community demands.[102] Randall developed the Problem Attack Behavior Inventory (PABI), a school leaders' problem-solving framework based on five categories of practice:[103]

- **Problem-recognition behavior:** the extent to which an administrator appears to perceive situations that are seen as problems by their staff.

- **Problem-analysis behavior:** the extent to which an administrator appears to discover and examine responses to problem situations.
- **Group-participation behavior:** the extent to which an administrator encourages those with whom he or she works to use initiative, to criticize, and to involve themselves in the solution of school problems.
- **Administrator-action behavior:** the extent to which an administrator acts on problem situations, including the quality of the action.
- **Administrator-evaluation behavior:** the extent to which an administrator reviews the results of his or her actions.

Very few problems confronted by superintendents have simple answers. Effective superintendents involve others in the decision-making process. They value the perceptions and insights of their school division employees and school board members and make skillful use of these resources in solving the problems. They know how to construct processes in which important decisions are made through collaboration.[104] Bridges and Hallinger discuss three benchmarks to assist decision-makers in deciding when to involve others in the decision process:[105]

- **The relevance rule.** Do subordinates have a personal stake in the decision-making outcome?
- **The expertise rule.** Do subordinates have expertise to contribute to the decision?
- **The commitment consideration**. Are subordinates committed to the organization and mission? Can they be trusted to make decisions in the best interests of the organization?

In a study by Leithwood and Steinbach, school boards were asked to identify those educational leaders in their systems who they considered "experts" and those they considered more "typical," and then compare problem-solving strategies of the two groups. The study found that the "experts" were better able to identify the problem situation and detect features of the problem that are similar to past problems. "Experts" were also better able to regulate their own problem-solving processes and were more sensitive to the task demands and the social contexts within which tasks are to be solved.[106] Hoyle et al. suggested that a systems-thinking approach in particular provides a useful template for identifying problems; this approach involves reflecting on causes, moving toward consensus on probable solutions, evaluating the effectiveness of interventions, and challenging conventional assumptions about practice to enhance effectiveness.[107] Hoy and Tarter proposed a model of decision-making which is drawn from the research of problem-solving, and adapted to educational administration. The five sequential steps of this model are:[108]

- Recognize and define the problem;
- Analyze the difficulties in the existing situation;
- Establish criteria for a satisfactory solution;
- Develop a strategy for action, including the specification of possible alternatives, the prediction of probable consequences, deliberation, and the selection of the action plan; and
- Initiate the plan of action.

Resource management

The management of division operations and resources is the backbone of a school division. Although the emphasis of the superintendency has in recent years moved from management to leadership, managerial imperatives and leadership imperatives are not contradictory; instead, they are interdependent.[109] Superintendents are strong leaders only when they effectively allocate time, money, personnel, and resources in ways that align with the goal of achievement for all students. Superintendent must therefore employ a divisionwide, division-centered approach to manage both the millions of taxpayer dollars invested annually in the division and the ever-increasing array of external demands.[110] As the complexity of the modern public school division has increased, developing and implementing operational plans and processes have become both more difficult and more critical.[111] The division's fiscal operations, bus services, nutrition services, maintenance and custodial services and the purchasing department all fall under the task of resource management. Facilities and other resources make possible the goal of ensuring the academic, physical, and emotional growth of all students. The effective superintendent manages resources so that the main focus is student learning.

Essential managerial duties of the superintendent include:[112]

- **Fiscal responsibilitie**s, such as setting spending priorities, distributing funds, and forecasting projected revenues;
- **Regulatory responsibilities,** such as ensuring compliance to accounting and auditing systems;
- **Operational responsibilities,** such as facilities management, purchasing and contracting, and property and supply management;
- **Personnel responsibilities,** such as labor relations, salary and wage management, and hiring policies.

All these resources must be effectively planned and coordinated to support long-term and short-term division needs. The major axiom of quality resource management in a school division is simple: make the most of every dollar available.[113] Superintendents should make sure that every program's expenditures and productivity are reviewed.

Organizational skills

Developing the organization is a significant aspect of effective leadership. Starratt visualizes the school organization as an onion. At the core are the beliefs, assumptions, goals, and myths that are the source of vision. The outer layers are composed of policies (the basic rules governing organizational behavior), programs (the division of the school's work into departments, grade levels, and offices), organization (the distribution of resources through budgets, schedules, and staffing), and operation (the visible work of classroom teaching and learning).[114] The integration of the vision and the organization requires versatile superintendents. Superintendents attend to aspects of the school division as an organization and a community, with consideration of internal processes and external relationships.[115] Leithwood and Riehl summarized that effective leaders enable the school and division to function as a holistic organization and sustain the performance of staff and teachers, as well as students in the following ways:[116]

- **Strengthening a positive culture.** Effective superintendents help develop school and division cultures that embody shared norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes, and they promote mutual caring and trust among all members. School and division culture sets a tone and context within which work is undertaken and goals are pursued.
- **Modifying organizational structure.** Effective leaders monitor and adjust the structural organization of the division, including how tasks are assigned and performed, the use of time and space, the acquisition and allocation of equipment, supplies, and other resources, and all of the routine operating procedures. Organizational structure is the skeletal framework within which people carry out their work. Structure can enhance or hinder individual performance and the accomplishment of organizational goals. Effective superintendents direct structural changes that will establish positive conditions for teaching and learning.
- **Building collaborative processes.** Educational leaders enhance the performance of their divisions by providing opportunities for staff to participate in decision-making about issues that affect them and for which their knowledge is crucial. In this way, leaders help others to shape the school in ways that can accomplish shared goals and address individual concerns as well.
- **Managing the environment.** Effective superintendents work with representatives from the school division's environment, including school board members, parents, community members, business and government liaison, and other influential stakeholders. They pursue positive interactions, with the goals of fostering shared meanings, garnering resources and support, and establishing productive inter-organizational relationships, in order to effectively position their school divisions within their environment, and respond to legitimate concerns from parents and others. Educational leaders are client-centered, proactive, and focused.

Communications and Community Relations

A superintendent sets the tone, style, and philosophy of a school system's organizational approach to communication.[117] Communities throughout the world agree that "high quality education improves community life and social cohesion, attracts and retains families, helps develop a skilled workforce, fosters economic growth, attracts new jobs, and increases real estate values."[118] The role of the public school superintendent is a critical component to the social fabric of American life, and the governance of its public schools.[119] Superintendents should nurture shared meanings among staff, parents, and the community to help guide action, and the understanding of events. They should also convey high expectations for performance by fostering acceptance of group goals and optimism in achieving them through sustained effort.[120]

Interpersonal relations

Communication is involved in more than 90 percent of a superintendent's work time and is used while on the phone, at meetings and appointments, while writing letters and reports, etc.[121] Thus, communication is a very important skill area which the superintendent can use to build constructive relation with constituents. Kindred, Bagin, and Gallagher defined communication as "a cooperative enterprise requiring the mutual interchange of ideas and information, and out of

which understanding develops and action is taken."[122] In order to communicate effectively, a superintendent needs to know what, how, and with whom to communicate.

Recent research literature on the superintendency shares a conception that effective superintendency, at its core, is about relationships. Coalitions, collaborations, and motivation determine whether initiatives produce desired and intended results. Therefore, the superintendent must build trust, focus attention on process, and work collaboratively with others to ensure their commitment in implementation.[123] Most superintendents are not natives to the communities they serve, and stay only about six to seven years before moving on to the next division. Serving and being accepted by the community are important parts of the superintendency. [124] The superintendents should have a deep understanding of the community values and expectations. In order to nurture relationships with key stakeholders, effective superintendents involve constituents in the goal setting process, share and publicize relevant school data, mobilize parents and community members, build local- or state-level coalitions, and communicate timely and relevant information to personnel. [125] Effective superintendents recognize the value of collaborative participation in the learning community as a way to build trust, collective responsibility, and to further the goal of improved student learning.[126]

Communication skills

Effective superintendents communicate timely and relevant information—particularly student achievement data—to all stakeholders (parents, community, media, etc.) with great clarity and frequency, so that the vision and mission of the division are understood and supported.[127] By being a proactive communicator, the superintendent builds trust, provides actionable guidance on personnel and programs, and demonstrates responsiveness to situations as they arise. [128] Openness and honesty are the keys to communication with the community and media. In communicating the division's vision, mission, and priorities, it is vital that the division produce easily understandable documents devoid of educational jargon.[129] Effective communication for the superintendent also requires the ability to listen, as well as to create the atmosphere and opportunities for listening to take place. It is empowering for the staff to believe in and experience openness and attentiveness from their peers and leaders. Their ideas and feelings must be heard but also acted upon. Superintendents must be visible and available to the educational community to encourage the exchange of ideas and emotions.[130]

Superintendents have been expected to develop and demonstrate exemplary communication competencies.[131] According to Kowalski and Björk, "The communicator role is shaped by two conditions: the need to restructure cultures and the need to access and use information in a timely manner to solve problems of practice." [132] The ability to understand not only what to communicate, but also how, and to whom is now considered essential to effective leadership. Technological advances have produced a world in which communication is intensified and the consequences of a mishap could spell disaster for any superintendent.[133]

Effective superintendents constantly reflect on information gained from listening to a broad range of constituents, reviewing decisions and school board minutes, and engaging in conversation with community leaders. Superintendents have a responsibility to inform the public on how the division is managing the human and fiscal resources entrusted to the school division.

The superintendent, as the lead spokesperson for the division, must articulate not only the vision and mission of the division but its position on key issues of interest to the public, such as student discipline, dress codes, school choice, attendance zone changes, and budget setting.[134]

Communication is perhaps the most needed skill of the superintendency. Houston believes that the role of superintendent in the 21st century requires an increased level of skill in the area of communication and that "the ability to communicate and market ideas will be critical."[135] There are many tools that can be used to maintain a steady flow of information to the community, such as newsletters, printed flyers, Web pages, and speaker bureaus. Effective superintendents are proactive in assessing the needs of their communities and developing a communications plan aligned to the division's plan and vision. Superintendents should carefully assess the information needs of the school staff and each group in the community, and then devise a system which conveys that information by the most efficient means available. Communications might include electronic or written messages, or personal or public meetings, as each situation warrants. Maintaining transparency and public perceptions of trust and confidence are keys to effective communication with the community. Importantly, each of the information-disseminating strategies should be evaluated to ensure that messages have been received and understood. Too much information can be as much of a problem as too little. The superintendent must gauge the content and quantity. This can best be done by feedback. Formal feedback can be generated by surveys; informal feedback comes from informal contact with parents, nonparents, and division staff.[136]

Support diverse populations

Superintendents are increasingly hampered by demographic shifts. Trained to deal with relatively homogeneous student bodies, they are instead managing divisions that are populated by students who reflect the growing diversity of the United States. School age children who are members of a minority group rose from 28 percent in 1980 to 41.2 percent in 2010[137], and the numbers are projected to increase to 50 percent by 2050 and 64 percent by 2100.[138] The demographics have important implications for the cultural competency of educational leaders.[139] Effective school superintendents need to develop an enhanced understanding of the diverse cultures that are represented in the division.

Superintendents must be knowledgeable and sensitive to cultures found in the community. Hoyle et al. suggested that the important tenet in cultural sensitivity is two-way communication between the superintendent and members of various cultural groups. Each stakeholder group has dreams and aspirations for its participation in society, as well as expectations for the education of its children. The superintendent's responsibility is ensuring that the division listens to and understands these stakeholders' expectations and aspirations.[140]

Orvando identified three best practice development strategies to prepare school leaders to be multiculturally competent: field-based experiences in diverse schools; visits to diverse schools; and courses that include multicultural competencies.[141] Weight and Harris examined the role of the superintendent in leading the division to be more culturally proficient, resulting in narrowing the achievement gap in culturally diverse small school divisions. They found that superintendents who recognize the importance of cultural proficiency and declare their

willingness to lead the division through necessary change to address cultural proficiency lead their divisions to a reduced achievement gap.[142]

Professionalism

Hoyle et al. stated that effective superintendents should: (a) understand and model appropriate value systems, ethics, and moral leadership; (b) know the role of education in democratic society; (c) exhibit multicultural competency and adapt education programming to the needs of diverse students in the school system; and (d) search for and develop opportunities for staff and students to grow.[143] Successful divisions have leaders who are professional, and able to manage the multiple pressures of their role. The superintendent of a school division has the top leadership role and ultimate responsibility for improving student performance. Effective superintendents hold themselves to this vision through professional performance in every aspect of their leadership role.

Professional demeanor and ethical behavior

Acting professional is really a combination of ethical practice and the characteristics of honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, integrity, and approachability.[144] Strong character and principles play an important role in effective leadership. Ethical leaders are *moral persons* who are honest, trustworthy, and fair. A significant part of the superintendent search and selection process is based on the superintendents' personal qualities and characteristics. For example, two-thirds of superintendents sampled in Glass' study indicated that they were hired because of "personal characteristics" (including the image they projected, or a role model they presented during the interview process), combined with information that search committee members gleaned through knowledgeable citizens in the candidates' divisions.[145]

Gardner says visionary leaders convey their messages through the kinds of lives they themselves lead, and, through example, seek to inspire in their followers.[146] According to Beckner, many educational administrators view ethics as ideas far removed from the everyday challenges of educational leadership and management. Yet they see their paramount duty as responsibility for the children that the community entrusts to their care, and this is an ethical consideration.[147] Central to the role of superintendency has been a moral and ethical obligation to prepare citizens for tomorrow's American democracy.[148]

Ethics must be an integral part of the superintendent's thought process starting with the vision and continuing with every decision made. Leading ethically becomes especially important when disparate stakeholder groups compete for limited time and resources. Ethical leaders were seen as principled decision-makers who care about people and the greater good of society. They are known for behaving ethically in their personal and professional lives. In addition, ethical leaders are also *moral managers*: they proactively attempt to influence followers' ethical and unethical behavior. They make ethics salient by communicating clear ethical standards, intentionally role modeling ethical behavior, and by using rewards and discipline to hold followers accountable for ethical conduct.[149] Brown defined ethical leadership as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion

of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making."[150]

According to the American Association of School Administrator, the ethical superintendent:[151]

- Makes the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision-making and actions;
- Fulfills professional responsibilities with honesty and integrity;
- Supports the principle of due process and protects the civil and human rights of all individuals;
- Obeys local, state, and national laws and does not knowingly join or support organizations that advocate, directly or indirectly, the overthrow of the government;
- Implements the governing board of education's policies and administrative rules and regulations;
- Pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies, and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals;
- Avoids using his or her position for personal gain through political, social, religious, economic, and other influences;
- Accepts academic degrees or professional certification only from duly accredited institutions;
- Maintains the standards and seeks to improve the effectiveness of the profession through research and continuing professional development; and
- Honors all contracts until fulfillment, release, or dissolution is mutually agreed upon by all contracting parties.

Collaboration

Paul Houston, executive director of American Association of School Administrators, summarizes the changing roles and expectation of superintendents, "Superintendents once were considered successful if they could manage the "B's" of division leadership: buildings, buses, books, budgets, and bonds; however, today the challenge is to shift the focus of division leadership to the "C's", including connection, communication, collaboration, community building, child advocacy, and curricular choices that lead to academic progress for all children."[152]

Currently, most of the attention on reforming schools focuses on the classroom. However, reform efforts that rely solely on the work of individual teachers or even exemplary principals are not enough. For most of the past two decades of change in K-12 education, researchers and policymakers have also acknowledged the importance of the division system in moving reform ahead. Hill stated, "…school reform ultimately has to happen in the classroom, but the odds that you're going to get spontaneous improvement in the classroom without changing the broader, regulatory environment are pretty low. Classrooms are the way they are in large part because of what happens at the division level."[153]

One characteristic of effective superintendents is willingness to engage staff in an inclusive and open discussion of issues facing the division. Coleman and LaRocque examined the link between division culture and high levels of student achievement.[154] They found that the leadership role of

the superintendent in high-performing divisions involved a considerable amount of team-building and collaboration with building principals and teachers. They found that the most fundamental differences between the high- and low-performing divisions were the superintendents' personal judgments about the value of consensus and the collaborative work of members in the organization toward the academic achievement of students.

Leaders realize that keeping abreast of, and informing staff about, current research and practice is critical to school success. They emphasize and communicate that schools are learning communities, and they provide both formal and informal opportunities for collaborative learning.[155] Research indicated that collaborative leadership could positively impact student learning through building the school's capacity for academic improvement.[156] There is empirical support that leadership for student learning is a process of mutual influence in which school capacity both shapes, and is shaped by the school's collective leadership.[157] In addition, research also indicated that a school division superintendent could increase principal instructional leadership through collaborating and fostering system coherence.[158]

Although time and attention devoted to one group may be disproportionate to that devoted to others, the effectiveness of a school system depends on the empowerment of all the partners in the educational endeavor. An image that helps represent this shared responsibility and relationship is a wheel. The superintendent is the hub with the spokes of empowerment connected to each group involved in the system.[159]

Research has indicated that empowering staff can stimulate cooperation and team-learning. Researchers have consistently demonstrated support for the value of making schools 'centers for caring' with flexible and inclusive leadership, rather than traditional bureaucracies with a rigid management-over-workers hierarchy.[160] School executives who wish to empower others are good listeners, understand the social and cultural structure of the division, and above all understand the human side of the organization. Empowering others builds human potential and leadership capacity. Hoyle et al. summarized the following four benefits of empowerment:[161]

- **Empowerment creates a positive, supportive school division culture and climate.** It binds staff members together by shared professional aspirations and thereby fosters esprit de corps among them.
- **Empowerment provides a mechanism for rewarding staff members.** Superintendents create a positive environment by encouraging and promoting people with passion and talent. This process inspires individuals to empower others and thus results in higher-performing school divisions.
- **Empowerment builds a pool of talent.** Individuals within the division, including women and minorities who may not fit the traditional image of school administrator, will be given the chance to advance. Rather than searching for talent outside the division, encouraging the potential within ensures continuity and morale.
- **Empowerment opens channels of communication.** When trust is established between the superintendent and others, the real issues of division improvement can be openly discussed. Empowerment creates a flow of information that is often blocked in school bureaucracies.

Professional development for the superintendent

Superintendents need ongoing professional development opportunities throughout their careers because the field of education is constantly changing. The school division superintendent position was created during the late 1800s; by 1900, most city school divisions had established this position. The need for school systems to have a top executive derived from a myriad of conditions including the development of larger school divisions, the consolidation of rural school divisions, an expanded state curriculum, the passage of compulsory attendance laws, demands for increased accountability, and efficiency expectations.[162] Kowalski depicted five role conceptualizations to demonstrate how the position of school division superintendent evolved over time:[163]

- **Teacher-scholar:** with the primary foci on implementing a state curriculum and supervising teachers;
- **Manager:** with the primary focus on scientific management to improve operations by concentrating on time and efficiency;
- **Democratic leader:** perceiving superintendents as acute political strategists;
- **Applied social scientist:** with the primary focus on applying scientific inquiry to the problems, emphasizing on empiricism, predictability, and scientific certainty in practice;
- **Communicator:** with primary focus on the capacity to work collaboratively with principals, teachers, parents, and taxpayers to build and pursue collective visions.

None of these five roles has become irrelevant to modern practice, and it is virtually impossible to neatly separate them. Accordingly, Björk and colleagues used the five conceptualizations to identify the knowledge and skills required for each role. The following table can serve as a framework for superintendent preparation and professional development.[164]

Knowledge and skills associated with superintendent role conceptualizations

Role	Pertinent Knowledge and Skills
Teacher-Scholar	Pedagogy; educational psychology; curriculum; instructional supervision; staff development; educational philosophy
Manager	Law; personnel administration; finance/budgeting; facility development/maintenance; collective bargaining/contract maintenance; public relations
Democratic Leader	Community relations; collaborative decision making; politics
Applied Social Scientist	Quantitative and qualitative research; behavioral sciences
Communicator	Verbal communications; written communication; listening; public speaking; media relations
Multirole	Motivation; organizational theory; organizational change and development; leadership theory; ethical/moral administration; technology and its applications; diversity/multiculturalism; human relations

An important strategy for superintendents' continuous professional development is reflection,[165] which aids a superintendent in understanding potential and actual problems faced by the division, gathering information, and moving towards solution strategies.

As leaders of schools, superintendents are isolated at the top of their organizations.[166] Training and professional learning options are narrow for today's superintendents because of the responsibilities placed on them as chief executive officers and because of the isolation of their work and positions. Superintendents often rely on professional support organizations and the advice of, and interactions with, other colleagues to constitute the majority of their professional development.[167] The need for superintendents to engage in continuous professional development will increase as the role continues to evolve, and expectations for greater accountability in student achievement increase.[168] In a recent study by Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella for the American Association of School Administrators, superintendents called for more support to ensure their well-being and job success, and more opportunities for professional training and counseling.[169]

Professional development for superintendents will be successful when the tenets of adult learning are followed. Case methods, Socratic dialogue, and critical inquiry are possible options for professional development. The process of professional development should include four major phases:[170]

- **Need.** Identify what learning is needed so as to achieve goals.
- **Create.** Create a strategy and resources to achieve the learning goals.
- **Implement.** Implement the learning strategy and use the learning resources.
- **Evaluate.** Assess the attainment of the learning goal and the process of reaching it.

Service to others

Superintendents can be of service to the learning community through mentoring—not just serving as a mentor for principals, but also to other employees of the school division who have aspirations to be leaders. Mentoring is a critical aspect of most professional improvement processes, which places the stewardship for learning the art and science of leadership and administration in the hands of veterans who are recognized for their knowledge and skills at coaching aspiring mentees.[171] A survey study conducted by American Association of School Administrators reported that mentoring is a widespread practice in the profession of superintendency.[172] Sixty-six percent of the responding superintendents had served as mentors to peers. Superintendents typically mentor colleagues by serving as role models, sharing information, providing feedback, offering insights, and helping to guide reflective practice. Furthermore, the amount, immediacy, and quality of feedback provided by mentors are directly related to learning and skill transfer.

Developing effective school leaders requires efforts by divisions, such as when divisions provide opportunities for teachers to engage in authentic leadership and socialization experiences with school administrators. Effective superintendents demonstrate the value of principalship and its requirements, and encourage talented educators to seek the position. Preparing individuals to become principals involves ongoing evaluation, supervision, coaching, and continuous career-long professional development.[173]

A study by Orr found that many new superintendents do not feel properly equipped for the demands of superintendency, and they present a strong need for professional learning.[174] Orr discovered that some new superintendents request professional development opportunities that include meeting with more experienced superintendents for guidance or coaching, context-based and problem-based professional development, and training based on gaining a greater understanding of fiscal matters. Correspondingly, veteran superintendents can be of service to the younger generation by providing professional development that emphasizes skills and building knowledge base while also creating opportunities for networking with others.[175]

Student Academic Progress

Schools divisions that have achieved continued improvement in student outcomes based decisions on data rather than on habit or hunch. Their superintendents and principals are able to monitor strengths and weaknesses in performance and proactively modify what is not working. They recognize that end-of-the-year standardized test is an important means to evaluate the summative performance students, but they are also aware that it does not provide all of the information the division needs. Therefore, they design multiple measures to assess school and student progress.[176] Tongeri and Anderson found school divisions that demonstrate significant improvement in academic achievement are determined to improve instruction and made decisions based on data, not instinct. They consistently do three things:[177]

- Systematically gather data on multiple issues, such as grades, student work, end-of-unit test scores, suspension information, mobility rates, attendance, diagnostic data, school and community climate, customer satisfaction, and demographic indicators;

- Develop multimeasure accountability systems to gauge student and school progress; and
- Encourage teachers and administrators to use data to guide decision-making.

Tongeri and Anderson also found that the leaders of high-improvement school divisions sought to incorporate a reflective and evidence-based approach to improve instructional capacity. They expected teachers to actively engage all students in rigorous content, assess the impact of instructional methods, reflect on their practice, collaborate with colleagues to research and share effective practice, and make timely and appropriate adjustments to maximize student learning.

Student progress

Waters and Marzano indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in student achievement based on the quality of division-level leadership.[178] They found that when the division leadership increases in quality by one standard deviation, average student academic achievement could increase from the 50th percentile to the 59.5th percentile, a gain of almost 10 percentile points. In addition, some of the essential goals of superintendency are to promote academic rigor in teaching and learning among staff and students to raise student performance on state and national exams, and to promote the demonstration of critical thinking and ethical behaviors among students.[179]

Public demands for accountability and improved school performance have never been greater. Björk stated: "Conventional assumptions about teaching and learning, as well as the manner in which schools are structured, managed, and governed, are being challenged, and recommendations for change are being advanced by a broad spectrum of reformers both within and outside of traditional educational circles."[180] These challenges and recommendations are centered on state, national, and international performance on test scores. Therefore, one of the greatest pressures on school superintendents is the one to obtain higher performance on high-stakes tests from the schools in their division.[181]

The increasing demand for accountability makes it no longer plausible that a superintendent goes before the school board or media, and simply claims that the division is doing a great job in educating students. Superintendents must have the skills to explain how well the students compare to others in the state and nation. The division leaders must be a linchpin in monitoring and evaluating student achievement on the basis of objectives and expected student outcomes. They also should have a proficient literacy of assessment to understand that assessment of teaching and learning is more than the traditional norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, and multiple-choice, it also includes more authentic measures, such as portfolios, exhibitions, performance events, and open-ended response items. Superintendents must find the best ways to respond to political and social demands for student success on high-stakes tests, but also find ways to promote among students critical, and creative thinking.[182]

Test-based accountability has gained support from political and corporate sectors demanding rigorous standards and accountability and from advocates for poor children who have been neglected and lagging behind in America's classrooms. Advantages of implementing high-stakes testing include their capacity to promote alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment through student performance data that allows educators to make informed instructional

decisions.[183] This narrow view of assessing student learning has created strong opposition as well, however; opponents argue that test-based accountability limits the curriculum and learning opportunities for all students, and should be replaced by more flexible child-centered policies.[184] Extant literature has documented both positive and negative impacts of standardized assessments on teachers' instruction and assessment at the classroom level. The positive evidence indicates that standardized tests motivate teachers to:

- Align their instruction to standards;
- Maximize instructional time;
- Work harder to cover more material in a given amount of instructional time; and
- Adopt a better curriculum or more effective pedagogical methods.[185]

Other research, however, reveals that high-stakes assessments force teachers to:

- Narrow the curriculum;
- Focus on memorization, drills, and worksheets;
- Allocate less time to higher-order skills; and
- Restrict their teaching to formulaic approaches to instruction.[186]

Superintendents must be skilled in responding to accountability demands, such as required state and federal benchmarks, with strategies to meet the benchmarks, and help promote a more comprehensive and inclusive learning environment in the school division. There is a delicate balance between following the vision of higher student test performance, and the professional and personal concerns of students, staff, and community.[187]

Supportive superintendents can influence classrooms through the establishment of mechanisms that can make improved teaching and learning a reality. As an instructional leader, the superintendent should incorporate research findings on learning and instruction, instructional time, and resources to maximize student outcomes and to apply best practices in the integration of curriculum and resources as well as assessment strategies to help all students achieve high levels.[188] In discussing the superintendent of the future, Doyle stated, "The true superintendent will be the CAO: Chief Academic Officer. That is what schools should be about, that is what school leadership should be about…academics first, academics last. Everything else should contribute to the school's academic mission."[189]

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