

**ENTRY PLAN FOR AN
INCOMING SUPERINTENDENT**

THE BROAD CENTER

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ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES FOR AN INCOMING SUPERINTENDENT

This document lists a series of potential activities designed to help an incoming superintendent begin his or her role as Chief Executive Officer in a new district. The orientation activities on the list are designed to enable the new leader to gather information quickly about the district and the community, to establish a community presence early on, and to create a network of contacts and resources to tap as he or she enters the job. The activities are listed in no particular order; all activities may or may not be appropriate in a given urban community.

District and City Tour

Purpose: To understand the district's geographic size and survey the distances and differences within the district

Activities:

- Arrange a highly visible helicopter (or driving) tour of the district's boundaries with the mayor, the police chief and other notable community, business and religious leaders
- In the first month on the job, visit various local communities with the individual school board member who represents that particular area of the city. On each day, visit schools (including some non-traditional schools, like charters or special education centers) and district field offices as well as offices of key community organizations (i.e. community centers, after school care facilities, church youth groups)

Political Leadership

Purpose: To meet local and state political power brokers and establish means for regular communication with them

Activities:

- Meet the local delegation to the Capitol, members of the Education Committee, the Chief State School Officer and the Governor's point-person on education. Bring the school board president, one or two senior staff members and union leadership
- Meet the County Superintendent of Schools and the County Board of Education
- Meet the Mayor and the City Council. If the district is not contiguous with a single city, meet some of the other mayors whose cities are part of the district's boundaries
- Ask the district's legal counsel to develop a primer on the state education code, with particular attention paid to statutes currently impacting or likely to impact the district

Community Leadership

Purpose: To meet leaders of community and parent organizations, generate good will, build support and establish critical communication channels

Activities:

- Ask each school board member to suggest 3-5 names of community organization leaders. Have the school board member arrange the meetings
- Hold community meetings. Consider a morning "oatmeal" circuit and/or small, evening gatherings sponsored by the PTA, the Urban League, the public education fund, ethnic advocacy organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, any other local business VIP organization and other key constituency groups
- If the district's student population is primarily one ethnicity (i.e. Latino), don't overlook other smaller, but fast-growing ethnic groups, i.e. Korean, Samoan, Thai, Japanese, Armenian

District Senior Staff

Purpose: Establish strong professional relationships with key personnel inside the district

Activities:

- Request a binder of resumes from the Personnel Office for the top 50 district staff positions
- Request briefing papers from the staff on critical issue areas: facilities, budget, litigation, data information systems, & technology, any recent reorganization or audit, plans for reading, math and science, etc. For each, ask senior staff to describe the district's current situation and ask what major decisions need to be made in one month, three months and six months
- Hold breakfasts off-site with 4-5 senior district staff members each week
- Determine how communication and decision-making will occur (vs. how it has always been done)

Board of Education

Purpose: Establish working relationships with individual board members and the board as a whole

Activities:

- Invite each board member and his or her spouse or significant other to dinner at a restaurant in the board member's district (board member picks the restaurant)
- Work with the board president and board committee chairs to determine how they will work together (internal communication, public engagement)
- Determine a schedule for regular off-site planning sessions with the board (at least six in first year)

Union Leadership

Purpose: Establish relationships with each of the district's labor unions and professional associations

Activities:

- Meet with the heads of the teacher, administrator, classified, police and other unions. Establish a regular communication pattern with union leaders
- Ask each union head for a meeting with their senior staff or elected representatives (for example, some teacher unions have a House of Representatives Executive Committee)
- Consider writing an article for the union newsletter

Media

Purpose: Clearly articulate your vision early so that the public, press and education community know what to expect. Generate publicity for early "listening and learning" efforts. Demonstrate seriousness of purpose to transform the district into a world-class education enterprise

Activities:

- Meet with local newspaper editorial boards, including the ethnic and business press. Target trade press (i.e. Education Week) for early interviews
- Invite TV, radio and newspaper reporters to appropriate community sessions in the first 100 days.
- If entering a district with a majority Latino student population, consider hiring a district press officer who is bilingual in Spanish

- Be accessible. Listen to what reporters say. Remember that they are largely responsible for defining whether or not you are a success in the eyes of the public. Building a relationship of trust will help you when problems arise

National Leadership

Purpose: Take the story of “the new XXX district” to key political, foundation and education leaders in the city, the state and across the county

Activities:

- Visit DC (with your city’s mayor?) to meet with that city’s DC delegation, the White House, the Council of Great City Schools, leaders in the Department of Education and others who can be helpful in providing resources and technical assistance to the district
- Invite national foundation presidents to visit you once the district is ready to ask for philanthropic resources to assist with its strategic priorities
- Tap into network of education organization leaders to assist with district’s strategic priorities and to bring fresh talent and expertise to any district that has traditionally been very parochial in its outreach efforts
- Consider taking advantage of The Broad Foundation’s “Strategic Support Teams” initiative (spend a closed-door, working weekend with highly regarded urban superintendents from across the country)

POSSIBLE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR AN INCOMING SUPERINTENDENT

This document lists critical issues a Superintendent might address upon his or her arrival at the district. They cover the gamut – some are short-term, quick hits and others are more strategic and long-term. They are listed in no particular order.

Facilities

- Understand the issues and recent plans underway to address them (i.e. plans for a local bond referendum)
- Develop an aggressive plan of action and communicate this plan throughout the district and the community
- Choose a SWAT team to fast-track the construction decision, design and build process

Labor Contract Negotiations

- Understand status of current labor contract negotiations
- Complete the negotiations within the proposed timetable
- Craft a contingency plan in the event that the unions do not agree to the terms proposed

Instructional Program

- Understand current goals and priority action areas (i.e. reading and math)
- Choose instructional leadership team (i.e. associate superintendent for instruction)
- Modify current instructional plans and priorities if necessary and communicate vision, goals and timetable to district and community

Accountability and Assessment (students and staff)

- Understand work-to-date in this area, including any performance data available (i.e. SAT-9)
- Clarify and widely communicate accountability expectations, including any rewards, consequences, assistance or intervention
- Follow through on the plan – shift the organizational culture to one where performance matters

Resource Allocation

- Understand current budget, budget system and upcoming budget decisions
- Understand plan of action to share budget with departments, sub-district units, schools and community
- Bring in external resources as necessary to work through difficult systems issues
- Align resources to support instructional program priorities

Information Systems

- Understand what exists, what does not exist, and what is on the “drawing board”
- Develop a visionary, aggressive plan to re-invent the district’s data systems capacity
- Hire a strong team to implement the vision

Professional Development

- Assess current training and support provided for all adults in the system, paying particular attention to the current capacity and the training needs of principals, teachers, and senior district staff

- Determine how to reallocate time and resources so that the vast majority of training focuses on key priority areas

Establishing Board-Superintendent Authorities

- Discuss board-superintendent roles explicitly (in a retreat setting)
- Get to know the board members individually and how they operate as a group
- Work to redraw the lines of authority and communication so that the board focuses on policy level issues and the superintendent and senior team focus on management issues (i.e. no more direct communication from board members to senior staff)

Developing a Business Plan for the District

- Understand what strategic and operating plans currently exist or are under development
- Develop one cohesive, easy to communicate strategic document that encompasses all of the district's strategic priorities, action plans and performance benchmarks
- Use the business plan as a "living document" and modify as necessary

Developing a Public Engagement Plan

- Work with the board of education and community leaders to determine early stage public engagement initiatives, with special attention paid to parents and parent organizations
- Craft a longer-term plan for parent and public engagement
- Work with area superintendents, senior district staff and board members to ensure consistency of message
- Develop a media outreach strategy to get good news out to the public
- Determine early on how communication will be handled when a crisis situation occurs