



# **The Power of Questions & Connections**

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“The most important single ingredient in the formula for success is knowing how to get along with people.”

- Theodore Roosevelt -

“A deep sense of love and belonging is an irresistible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, be loved, and to belong. When those things are not met, we don’t function as we were meant to be.”

- Brene Brown-

# Three Envelopes



**A few common mistakes to avoid making ...**

# Lack of Stakeholder Engagement

**Explanation:** New superintendents sometimes implement changes or make decisions without fully understanding the needs, concerns, and perspectives of various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, and community members.

**Impact:** This can lead to resistance, misunderstandings, and a lack of buy-in for new initiatives, ultimately hampering the effectiveness of the superintendent's efforts.

# Insufficient Focus on Data-Driven Decisions

**Explanation:** Some superintendents may rely too heavily on intuition or past experiences rather than utilizing available data to inform their decisions.

**Impact:** This approach can result in ineffective policies or initiatives that don't address the actual needs or challenges within the district, potentially leading to wasted resources and missed opportunities for improvement.

# Overloading the System with Initiatives

**Explanation:** Eager to make a positive impact, new superintendents might introduce multiple new programs or reforms simultaneously without considering the district's capacity to absorb and implement these changes.

**Impact:** This can overwhelm staff and students, leading to burnout, decreased morale, and a lack of sustained focus on any single initiative, ultimately diminishing the overall effectiveness of their efforts.



**These can be avoided (in part) through asking questions and making connections.**

# Listening to Connect and Lead

- Being strategic in how you engage the diverse needs of your stakeholders is critical.
- Be open, listen and learn, rather than only outlining your mission.
- Listen as if you were required to paraphrase.
- Reflect on the voices making themselves heard. How should they be prioritized and what voices are missing? Why?
- Are you asking the right questions? You will get the information you ask for but is that the information you want?

# Questioning with Purpose & Curiosity, not Obligation or Investigation

- Are your questions coming from a place of curiosity (helping to grow the culture), or will they be viewed as skeptical (damaging the culture)?
  - What are you most proud of?
  - What are you known for?
  - What obstacles get in your way?
  - What have you been waiting to do?
  - What advice would you have for me as the incoming Superintendent

# Will Your Efforts Build ...

- An understanding of the current culture?
- The foundation for the culture you seek?
- Connections to teachers, staff, community, and the Board?
- Influence over those who hold influence in the district?
- A sense of belonging so that all can grow?

# Your Leadership Team

- Why does your Leadership Team exist?
- Are they innovative or reactive?
- Is there a shared responsibility for the success of the district?
- How do they communicate with each other? With you?
- How are you nurturing and cultivating this team?
- How will you grow with them?

# Strategic Planning vs Strategic Thinking

- Know your district's current strategic plan
- Use strategic thinking to account for community voice and use district data to determine the current state of the district.
- Strategic thinking will allow you to review and adjust short-term goals on an ongoing basis.
- Lean on your Leadership Team and those with influence to assist with adjusting short-term goals.

# Now That You've Listened and Learned

- Create “Buckets” and synthesize the feedback
- Find the patterns, commonalities, and differences
- Ask more questions if you need to
- Develop your vision/action plan but DO NOT RUSH!
- Providing solutions/initiatives too early is dangerous
- Think about how you will communicate your vision/action plan.

# Leading During and After a Crisis

- When in crisis, stay focused and keep moving the district toward safety.
- Resilient, Focused, and Hopeful
- Keep your Board informed (as appropriate).
- After the crisis is probably the most difficult. You are now in recovery mode.
- You will need to recognize what has been damaged, or harmed, and develop a recovery plan to repair.
- Lean on your Leadership Team and those with influence to assist with the recovery plan.



# Closing Thoughts

- Be a good listener, communicate, and develop cohesive plans
- Strike a balance between not acting too quickly, but also demonstrating well measured moves
- Understand what the previous person in your role was thought to be successful or not successful in (Remember the three envelopes)
- Keep your Board well informed and educated on appropriate matters

# Questions



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