



SOLIDIFYING A LEADERSHIP APPROACH AND ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

A Toolkit for K-12 Superintendents

December 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
OVERVIEW	4
AUDIENCE	5
DEVELOP A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH	6
Description of Strategy	6
Tools to Apply Strategy	7
ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS	16
Description of Strategy	16
Tools to Apply Strategy	16
MANAGE CONFLICT AND PROMOTE CONSENSUS	32
Description of Strategy	32
Tools to Apply Strategy	34
ENDNOTES	40
ABOUT HANOVER RESEARCH	45

INTRODUCTION

There are inherent rewards and professional satisfaction from helming a school system as superintendent, but the job of a superintendent has also been described as being challenging “on a good day.”¹ Indeed, while superintendents exert tremendous influence over their district, they must also manage various facets of district operations while simultaneously tackling the problems impacting their schools and communities and collaborating and communicating with school community members—particularly their school boards—to do so.² Superintendents must navigate “standard” managerial responsibilities—such as human resource and financial management—while addressing ongoing educational problems (e.g., staff shortages, school safety, academic inequity) and novel situations that will arise and impact students, families, and staff members.³

Defining the Nature of School Superintendency

The chief executive officer (CEO) of a school district is the school superintendent. The superintendent is essentially the face of the district. They are most responsible for the successes of a district and most assuredly responsible when there are failures. The role of a school superintendent is broad. It can be rewarding, but the decisions they make can also be especially difficult and taxing. It takes an exceptional person with a unique skill set to be an effective school superintendent.

Much of what a superintendent does involves working directly with others. School superintendents must be effective leaders who work well with other people and understand the value of building relationships. A superintendent must be adept at establishing working relationships with many interest groups inside the school and within the community itself to maximize their effectiveness. Building a strong rapport with the constituents in the district makes fulfilling the required roles of a school superintendent a little easier.

Source: ThoughtCo⁴

Since the 2019-20 school year, superintendents have faced increased and unprecedented challenges resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ These challenges are diverse, ranging from effects of lost or disrupted instructional time to changing public health guidance to staff shortages impacting several classes of positions (e.g., teachers, bus drivers).⁶ At the same time, superintendents are facing increased polarization within the school boards they report to, the communities they serve, and the schools they govern that has intensified the positions stakeholders hold on educational issues and exacerbated the conflict superintendents experience in seeking to manage diverse viewpoints in their districts.⁷

Given these dynamics, it is paramount superintendents “oversee their district’s implementation of policies and laws established by state and national agencies, the judiciary, and local boards” while remaining informed about their local community’s unique opportunities and challenges and community members’ ever-evolving opinions on K-12 policy decisions.⁸ Primarily, this involves superintendents establishing and maintaining productive relationships with school board members—both those with tenure and those newly elected to their positions—and clarifying their specific roles and responsibilities versus those assumed by the school board.⁹ Likewise, superintendents need to enact specific competencies and apply key knowledge to resolve conflicts with their school board, navigate disagreements between board members, and promote consensus that accounts for and considers all viewpoints for a given issue.¹⁰

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Attributes of an Effective Superintendent



HAS A CLEAR VISION FOR THE DISTRICT

The superintendent works with the school board to set the vision, goals, and objectives for the district and then implements actions and programs to achieve the vision, goals, and objectives.



ACTS AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

The superintendent commits to ensuring that students learn and achieve at high levels. They understand best practices for maximizing student achievement and supporting teachers.



COMMUNICATES EFFECTIVELY

The superintendent makes a concerted effort to communicate the needs and accomplishments of the district in a variety of formats (e.g., written reports, public meetings, attendance at school events).



PRACTICES GOOD MANAGEMENT

The superintendent directs other district leaders and school-level administrators and staff to accomplish the goals of the district, monitors systemic progress, and evaluates systemic performance relative to goals.



LISTENS TO SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The superintendent solicits feedback from and thoughtfully considers differing viewpoints of various constituencies (e.g., families, staff) and then makes the best decision—in line with school board policies.



FULFILLS COMMITMENTS AND TAKES RISKS

The superintendent sets a bold agenda to achieve the vision, goals, and objectives articulated by the school board and makes responsible—but ambitious—decisions about programs and systemic actions.



REMAINS FLEXIBLE

The superintendent manages the politics of the job as they adapt to new board members, shifts in state funding, and changes in the school community—all while not sacrificing the district's vision. The superintendent takes a collaborative approach rather than a confrontational one.

Source: GreatSchools¹¹

OVERVIEW

Superintendents and school boards across the United States are preparing for the turnover of school board members after the November 2021 election. New school board members will be joining an already complex and often contentious landscape as districts and communities continue to debate varying strategies related to COVID-19, equity, and an array of other issues. Both new and tenured superintendents will experience challenges in developing a positive and functional relationship with their school boards and managing conflict between and within school boards.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To help superintendents navigate the aforementioned challenges, this toolkit presents strategies and accompanying tools superintendents can use to develop their leadership approach and skills to support a positive, productive, and long-term working relationship with school board members. Specifically, this toolkit examines and includes tools related to three essential superintendent leadership strategies:

- 1 **DEVELOPING A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH** that will guide a superintendent's execution of their leadership duties and create consistency for school board members regarding what to expect from a superintendent in terms of their values, priorities, and actions (see pp. 6-15);
- 2 **ESTABLISHING NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS** so the superintendent and school board have clarity about their roles and responsibilities, how those roles and responsibilities overlap and diverge from one another, and the manner in which each party should execute their responsibilities and collaborate with one another (see pp. 16-32); and
- 3 **MANAGING CONFLICT IN DISTRICT GOVERNANCE** as it may manifest between the superintendent and the school board and within the board itself (i.e., between individual or factions of board members) so all involved parties maintain their focus on and commitment to student success and the larger community's needs (see pp. 33-40).

Hanover Research—in collaboration with the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) and the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators (MASA)—has also published the research brief **Effective Superintendent and School Board Collaboration** ([available here](#)). This research brief aims to equip superintendents with theoretical knowledge and practical insights to foster a constructive work environment with school board members. As such, the research brief serves as a valuable complement to this toolkit.¹²

AUDIENCE

This toolkit is designed to support new and current superintendents in the state of Washington as they seek to establish and maintain relationships with their school boards—including members elected to their posts during the most recent school board election cycle. By applying the strategies and using the corresponding tools contained in this toolkit, superintendents will better position themselves to lead their districts effectively through ongoing and novel challenges and, ultimately, promote better outcomes for students, families, staff, and the larger district community.

DEVELOP A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH

Description of Strategy

Ideally, when superintendent begins their tenure at a given school district and periodically throughout their tenure (e.g., start of a new school year, following a school board elections cycle), **they will “clearly define [and redefine their] vision and communicate it in such a way as to foster enthusiasm and commitment throughout” their district and clarify their priorities and core beliefs to school board members.**¹³

While they will ultimately be responsible for working toward their district’s vision, superintendents should first outline their own conceptualization of how they hope the district will perform and operate in the future as a foundation for their collaborations with the school board and their ongoing leadership of district and school community members.¹⁴ Similarly, a superintendent’s personal vision for themselves and the organization they lead can penetrate into their district’s vision, motivate others, and support establishment of the superintendent’s broader approach to leadership.¹⁵

At the same time, **superintendents must adopt and practice a stable leadership approach and managerial style** that is consistent with their vision, positions them as a leader worth following, and communicates capability and commitment to all stakeholders—including the school board.¹⁶ This process includes superintendents self-reflecting on their own strengths, priorities, and preferences to determine *what kind of leader* they want to be (e.g., a servant leader, a democratic leader, a situational leader).¹⁷ Such self-reflection should also consider existing professional standards for educational leaders (such as those recorded in the table below) and the particular dynamics, challenges, and history of their district communities in deciding how they intend to portray themselves as leaders, make decisions, and take action.¹⁸ The main idea is that a superintendent should understand their own style and skills and their community’s needs and values to identify overlap and determine what particular leadership approach—or approaches—will be of greatest positive impact during their tenure.¹⁹

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

STANDARD	EXPLANATION
Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values	Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education, academic success, and well-being for each student.
Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms	Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.
Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.
Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.
Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students	Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.
Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel	Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.

DEVELOP A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH

STANDARD	EXPLANATION
Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff	Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community	Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 9: Operations and Management	Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 10: School Improvement	Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Source: National Policy Board for Educational Administration²⁰

Tools to Apply Strategy

To support superintendents in implementing this strategy, this section includes the following tools:



Leadership Vision Development Worksheet for Superintendents – [pp. 8-10](#)

This worksheet will help users draft a leadership vision statement they will commit to as superintendent of a given school district. This statement will guide superintendent decision-making, actions, and collaboration with others as they work to enact the school board's articulated priorities and agenda.



Leadership Styles Reflection Exercise for Superintendents – [pp. 11-12](#)

This exercise contains activities that will allow users to acquire insights into their own leadership style and how it impacts their work as a superintendent. Superintendents should remember different conceptions of leadership styles exist, though this exercise is designed to give them language and knowledge to describe their values and priorities as a leader and how they work independently and manage and collaborate with others.



Communicating Intent as a Leader Planning Template – [pp. 13-15](#)

This template will help superintendents outline a plan for how they will communicate about their leadership vision and styles and their intended goals and actions in pursuit of excellence at their district. By completing this planning template, superintendents will be able to enact a multi-pronged communication strategy that familiarizes all school community members with their experiences, values, and goals.

DEVELOP A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH



LEADERSHIP VISION DEVELOPMENT WORKSHEET FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

Directions: Follow the prompts and answer the questions in this worksheet to draft a leadership vision statement you will commit to as superintendent of your school district. This statement will guide your decision-making, actions, and collaboration with others as you work to enact the school board's articulated priorities and agenda.

In the spaces provided below, record 5-10 values that are most important to you as a leader (e.g., accountability, empathy, teamwork).

1.	6.
2.	7.
3.	8.
4.	9.
5.	10.

What do you believe are the three most important functions of school districts? Record your responses in the spaces provided below.

1.
2.
3.

DEVELOP A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH

What do you believe are your three most important responsibilities as a superintendent? Consider your various roles and your obligations to various constituencies in the district community (e.g., school board, students, staff). Then, record your responses in the spaces provided below.

1.

2.

3.

Review your responses to the three preceding prompts. How can you manifest your values, your beliefs about school districts, and your perception of a superintendent's responsibilities in your vision and style of leadership? Is there overlap between these items, or are there contradictions that need to be resolved? Please record your response in the space provided below.

DEVELOP A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH

Review your responses to the four preceding prompts. Based on these responses, how would you articulate your vision for your work as a superintendent and as a leader more generally? Consider what your ideal outcomes and performance would look like and the goals you want to aspire to personally and that you have for your district. Please record your leadership vision statement in the space provided below.

Source: Multiple²¹



LEADERSHIP STYLES REFLECTION EXERCISE FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

Directions: Complete each of the activities presented within this exercise to acquire insights into your own leadership style and how it impacts your work as a superintendent. Please remember different conceptions of leadership styles exist, but this exercise is designed to give you language and knowledge to describe your values and priorities as a leader and how you work independently and manage and collaborate with others.

ACTIVITY 1

Read through the leadership styles and their descriptors presented below. Consider which styles most directly apply to how you lead others and best match your skills, knowledge, and personality. Then, mark the mark three of the listed leadership styles as follows:

- **Your primary leadership style:** Think about which style *best* describes you. Mark this style with a “1.”
- **Your secondary leadership style:** Think about which style describes you *second best*. Mark this style with a “2.”
- **Your tertiary leadership style:** Think about which style describes you *third best*. Mark this style with a “3.”
- In addition, mark those leadership styles which *do not accurately describe you in any way* with an “X.” Considered otherwise, mark those styles which definitely do not apply to you with an “X.”

_____ **Collaborator:** empathetic, team-building, talent-spotting, coaching-oriented

_____ **Energizer:** charismatic, inspiring, connects emotionally, provides meaning

_____ **Pilot:** strategic, visionary, adroit at managing complexity, open to input, team-oriented

_____ **Provider:** action-oriented, confident in own path and methods, loyal to colleagues and subordinates, driven to provide for others

_____ **Harmonizer:** reliable, quality-driven, execution-focused, creates positive and stable environments, inspires loyalty

_____ **Forecaster:** learning-oriented, deeply knowledgeable, visionary, cautious in decision-making

_____ **Producer:** task-focused, results-oriented, linear thinker, loyal to tradition

_____ **Composer:** independent, creative, problem-solving, decisive, self-reliant

DEVELOP A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH

ACTIVITY 2

Complete the two leadership style assessments described below. Answer the associated reflection question based on your results.

Interactive Leadership Style Assessment ([hyperlinked here](#))

This assessment presents users with 12 multiple choice questions to help determine if a given user displays one of six leadership styles:

- Servant;
- Transformation;
- Postmodern; and
- Front-line;
- Metamodern;
- Contrarian.

What leadership style were you assigned after completing this assessment?

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Servant | <input type="checkbox"/> Front-Line | <input type="checkbox"/> Transformation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Metamodern | <input type="checkbox"/> Postmodern | <input type="checkbox"/> Contrarian |

Do you believe the assigned style accurately describes you as a leader? Why?

Atlassian Natural Leadership Style Quiz ([hyperlinked here](#))

This quiz presents users with seven multiple choice questions to help determine if a given user displays one of seven leadership styles:

- Authoritarian/autocratic;
- Coaching;
- Servant; and
- Bureaucratic;
- Transformational/visionary;
- Laissez-faire.
- Democratic;

What leadership style were you assigned after completing this assessment?

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Authoritarian/autocratic | <input type="checkbox"/> Coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Servant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bureaucratic | <input type="checkbox"/> Transformational/visionary | <input type="checkbox"/> Laissez-faire |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Democratic | | |

Do you believe the assigned style accurately describes you as a leader? Why?

Source: Multiple²²

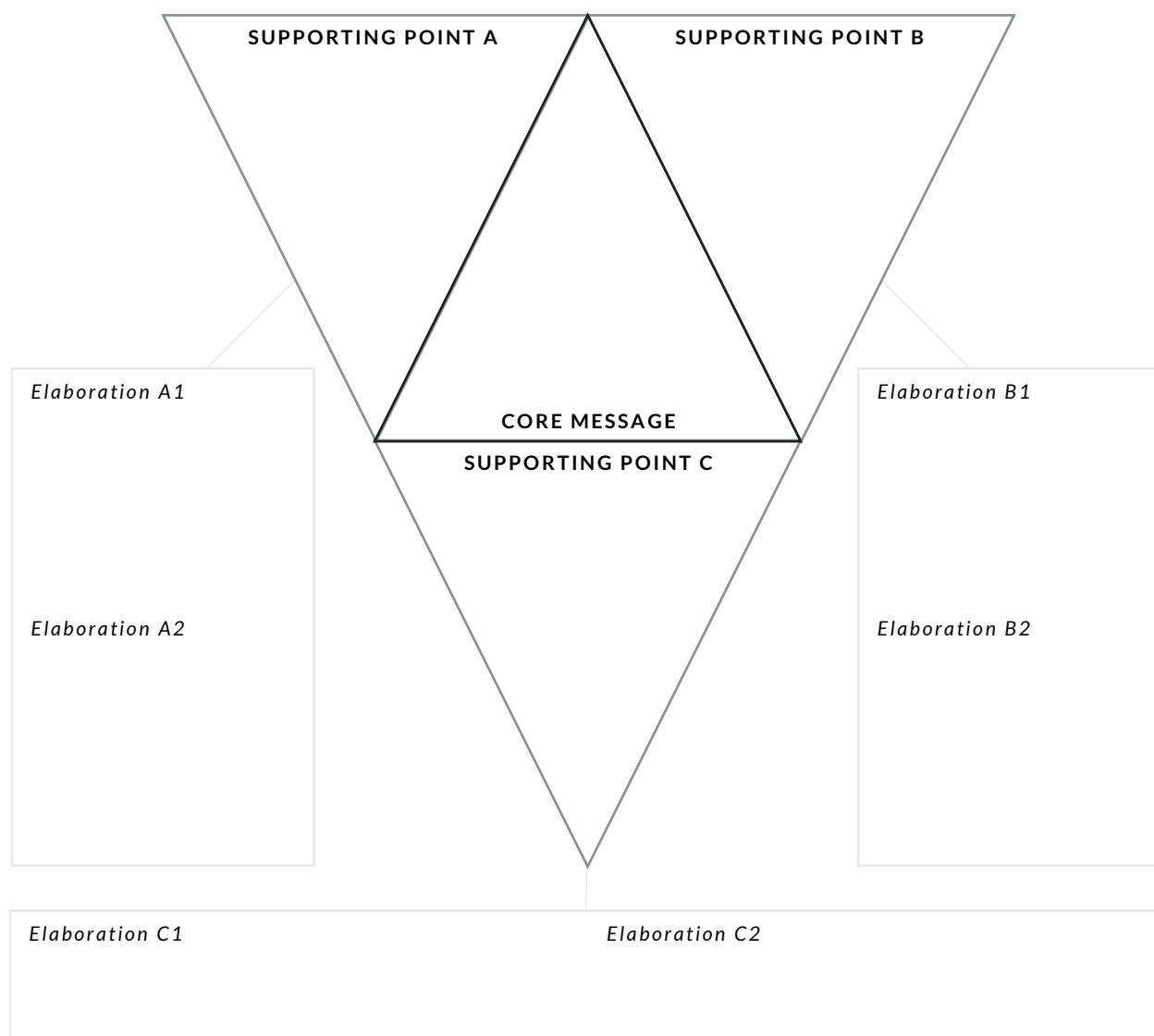


COMMUNICATING INTENT AS A LEADER PLANNING TEMPLATE

Directions: Respond to the prompts and questions beginning below to outline a plan for how you will communicate about your leadership vision and styles and your intended goals and actions in pursuit of excellence at your district. By completing this planning template, you will be able to enact a multi-pronged communication strategy that familiarizes all school community members with your experiences, values, and goals.

Using the Message Planning Triangle below, complete the following:

- In the central section, record the **core message** you wish to communicate to school community members about your leadership vision and style.
- In each of the three outlying sections, record a **supporting point** that reinforces and adds detail to the core message.
- In each callout box, record 1-2 **elaborations** to help clarify the corresponding supporting point.



DEVELOP A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH

Using the template below, outline 2-4 mechanisms/communications channels by which you will communicate the preceding message and supporting and elaborative points to key constituencies in your district.

MECHANISM/COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL 1

What mechanism/communications channel type do you intend to utilize? *Select one.*

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Direct message
(e.g., email, print mail, newsletter, Tweet) | <input type="checkbox"/> Static content
(e.g., website, print postings, profile) | <input type="checkbox"/> Public forum
(e.g., board meeting, town hall, speech) | <input type="checkbox"/> Media release
(e.g., newspaper, press release, TV interview) |
|---|---|---|--|

Which constituency(ies) do you intend to reach using the selected mechanism/communications channel? *Select all that apply.*

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School board | <input type="checkbox"/> District staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Families | <input type="checkbox"/> Students |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community partners | <input type="checkbox"/> State/regional officials | <input type="checkbox"/> Local taxpayers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Are there any particular considerations/concerns you should address when articulating your message in this format and to these constituencies?

MECHANISM/COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL 2

What mechanism/communications channel type do you intend to utilize? *Select one.*

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Direct message
(e.g., email, print mail, newsletter, Tweet) | <input type="checkbox"/> Static content
(e.g., website, print postings, profile) | <input type="checkbox"/> Public forum
(e.g., board meeting, town hall, speech) | <input type="checkbox"/> Media release
(e.g., newspaper, press release, TV interview) |
|---|---|---|--|

Which constituency(ies) do you intend to reach using the selected mechanism/communications channel? *Select all that apply.*

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School board | <input type="checkbox"/> District staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Families | <input type="checkbox"/> Students |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community partners | <input type="checkbox"/> State/regional officials | <input type="checkbox"/> Local taxpayers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

When will you disseminate the message using this mechanism/communications channel?

DEVELOP A VISION AND LEADERSHIP APPROACH

MECHANISM/COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL 3

What mechanism/communications channel type do you intend to utilize? *Select one.*

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Direct message
(e.g., email, print mail,
newsletter, Tweet) | <input type="checkbox"/> Static content
(e.g., website, print
postings, profile) | <input type="checkbox"/> Public forum
(e.g., board meeting,
town hall, speech) | <input type="checkbox"/> Media release
(e.g., newspaper, press
release, TV interview) |
|--|--|--|---|

Which constituency(ies) do you intend to reach using the selected mechanism/communications channel? *Select all that apply.*

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School board | <input type="checkbox"/> District staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Families | <input type="checkbox"/> Students |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community
partners | <input type="checkbox"/> State/regional
officials | <input type="checkbox"/> Local taxpayers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
_____ |

Are there any particular considerations/concerns you should address when articulating your message in this format and to these constituencies?

MECHANISM/COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL 4

What mechanism/communications channel type do you intend to utilize? *Select one.*

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Direct message
(e.g., email, print mail,
newsletter, Tweet) | <input type="checkbox"/> Static content
(e.g., website, print
postings, profile) | <input type="checkbox"/> Public forum
(e.g., board meeting,
town hall, speech) | <input type="checkbox"/> Media release
(e.g., newspaper, press
release, TV interview) |
|--|--|--|---|

Which constituency(ies) do you intend to reach using the selected mechanism/communications channel? *Select all that apply.*

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School board | <input type="checkbox"/> District staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Families | <input type="checkbox"/> Students |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community
partners | <input type="checkbox"/> State/regional
officials | <input type="checkbox"/> Local taxpayers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
_____ |

When will you disseminate the message using this mechanism/communications channel?

Source: Multiple²³

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

Description of Strategy

Generally, the school board governs and sets legal policies and strategic priorities for a given district that they delegate authority to the superintendent to enact on their behalf.²⁴ In addition, superintendents should understand state policy on their own professional duties and responsibilities. Beyond understanding the legally mandated role of the school board versus their own, **superintendents must establish working norms and clarity of shared responsibilities between themselves and their school board—and of responsibilities exclusive to each party.**²⁵ Such efforts should extend beyond formal responsibilities to encompass expectations-setting for *how* superintendents and school board members will communicate with each other, conduct themselves when collaborating, and complete their individual work (e.g., mutual respect).²⁶ This is important so superintendents can conduct their duties under clear expectations and with minimal conflict as they interact with the school board and enact board policies and strategic initiatives.²⁷

Tools to Apply Strategy

To support superintendents in implementing this strategy, this section includes the following tools:



Superintendent and School Board Responsibilities Brainstorm - [pp. 18-21](#)

This worksheet will help superintendents and school board members outline their personal beliefs about the school board's and superintendent's responsibilities in specific areas of school governance. Completing this worksheet will establish individual views on the division of responsibilities and set the stage to have formal conversations including the full school board and superintendent to codify each party's responsibilities.



Superintendent and School Board Role Clarification Worksheet - [pp. 22-30](#)

This tool should be used by superintendents and school board members during scheduled private meeting time—either at the beginning of a new school year or after the inauguration of new school board members—to define or clarify their roles in school governance. Each section of this worksheet focuses on a particular area of district functions and operations (e.g., curriculum and instruction, human resources) and asks superintendents and school board members to outline their specific—and shared—responsibilities for each area.



Superintendent and School Board Ten Commandments Activity - [pp. 31-32](#)

This tool should be used by superintendents and school board members during scheduled private meeting time—either at the beginning of a new school year or after the inauguration of new school board members—to set professional norms and expectations. In this activity, superintendents and the school board will outline ten norms or behavioral expectations (i.e., commandments) that will direct all of their interactions and collaborative work with one another and how they will complete their individual and shared responsibilities.

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS






SUPERINTENDENT AND SCHOOL BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES BRAINSTORM




Directions: Distribute this worksheet to the individual members of your school board and complete it yourself. Respond to the prompts and questions beginning below to outline what you *personally* believe the school board's and superintendent's responsibilities are in specific areas of school governance. By completing this worksheet, users will establish their views on the division of responsibilities between the school board and superintendent and set the stage to have formal conversations including the full school board and superintendent to codify each party's responsibilities.

For each area listed below, record two responsibilities you believe the school board and superintendent should assume. In addition, record at least one responsibility you believe should be shared by the school board and superintendent.

I. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND GOAL-SETTING




 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

II. POLICY-MAKING




 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS




III. BUDGETING AND FINANCE

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

IV. HUMAN RESOURCES AND PERSONNEL




 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

V. ACADEMIC PROGRAMS, CURRICULUM, AND INSTRUCTION




 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS




VI. SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIALIZED CLASSIFICATIONS

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

VII. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AND NON-ACADEMIC PROGRAMS




 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

VIII. DISTRICT OPERATIONS

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

IX. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

Source: Multiple²⁸






SUPERINTENDENT AND SCHOOL BOARD ROLE CLARIFICATION WORKSHEET

Directions: Schedule private meeting time with your entire school board to complete this worksheet—either at the beginning of a new school year or after the inauguration of new school board members—to define or clarify your roles in school governance. Each section of this worksheet focuses on a particular area of district functions and operations (e.g., curriculum and instruction, human resources) and asks superintendents and school board members to outline their specific and shared responsibilities for each area. *Please note this worksheet may require multiple sessions to complete given the volume of areas superintendents and school board members will need to coordinate around.*

I. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND GOAL-SETTING




In the diagram presented below, record the superintendent's and school board's exclusive and shared responsibilities related to strategic planning for district programming and operations and goal-setting for district performance and outcomes.

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

II. POLICY-MAKING




In the diagram presented below, record the superintendent's and school board's exclusive and shared responsibilities related to policy-making—both as a response to federal and state mandates and to address concerns raised by the local school community.

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

III. BUDGETING AND FINANCE




In the diagram presented below, record the superintendent's and school board's exclusive and shared responsibilities related to budgeting and financial decisions—both during annual budget-setting and in terms of approving new and ongoing financial transactions with vendors.

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

IV. HUMAN RESOURCES AND PERSONNEL




In the diagram presented below, record the superintendent's and school board's exclusive and shared responsibilities related to personnel management and human resources (e.g., hiring, negotiations with employee unions and associations).

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

V. ACADEMIC PROGRAMS, CURRICULUM, AND INSTRUCTION




In the diagram presented below, record the superintendent's and school board's exclusive and shared responsibilities related to academic programming, curriculum, and instruction (e.g., selecting instructional materials, adopting certain pedagogies, grading policies).

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

VI. SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIALIZED CLASSIFICATIONS




In the diagram presented below, record the superintendent's and school board's exclusive and shared responsibilities related to academic programs and supports for students with specialized classifications (e.g., students with disabilities, English learners, gifted and talented students).

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

VII. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AND NON-ACADEMIC PROGRAMS




In the diagram presented below, record the superintendent's and school board's exclusive and shared responsibilities related to student support services (e.g., mental health services, nutritional programs) and non-academic programs (e.g., school sports, extracurricular programs).

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

VIII. DISTRICT OPERATIONS




In the diagram presented below, record the superintendent's and school board's exclusive and shared responsibilities related to various facets of district operations (e.g., transportation, facilities management).

<div> SUPERINTENDENT</div>	<div> SHARED</div>	<div> SCHOOL BOARD</div>

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

IX. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

In the diagram presented below, record the superintendent's and school board's exclusive and shared responsibilities related to community engagement and communications generally and as it relates to specific constituencies (e.g., students' families, local government agencies).

 SUPERINTENDENT	 SHARED	 SCHOOL BOARD


Source: Multiple²⁹

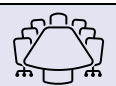


SUPERINTENDENT AND SCHOOL BOARD TEN COMMANDMENTS ACTIVITY


Directions: Schedule private meeting time with your entire school board to complete this worksheet—either at the beginning of a new school year or after the inauguration of new school board members— to set professional norms and expectations. In this activity, you and your school board will outline ten norms or behavioral expectations (i.e., commandments) that will direct **all of your interactions and collaborative work with one another and how you will complete your individual and shared responsibilities.**


Discuss how you believe superintendents and school board members should work together. Are there any rules you should be following in verbal and written communications? Should any procedures guide formal and informal meetings between superintendents and school board members? Consider these items and draft ten norms or behavioral expectations (i.e., commandments) that should govern the superintendents' work, the school board's work, and their interactions with each other and the larger district community.

 SUPERINTENDENT COMMANDMENTS	
Sample	The superintendent will provide all board members with the same information and updates about district performance.
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

 SCHOOL BOARD COMMANDMENTS	
Sample	Each board member will review the superintendent's updates and provided data before any scheduled meeting.
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

ESTABLISH NORMS FOR SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS

 SUPERINTENDENT COMMANDMENTS (continued)
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

 SCHOOL BOARD COMMANDMENTS (continued)
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Source: Superintendent of Schools, Educational Support Services³⁰

MANAGE CONFLICT AND PROMOTE CONSENSUS

Description of Strategy

By their very nature as a collection of elected officials, school boards are inherently driven to conflict in some form as individual members jockey to enact the agenda they advocated to voters.³¹ While conflict may manifest as momentary disagreement or differing opinions on the language of a given policy draft, other conflicts will be more controversial and school board members will be more entrenched in their chosen positions.³² In such situations, **superintendents must be intentional in the strategies they deploy to negotiate conflict and steer the board toward a resolution that results in the best outcomes for students.**³³

Superintendents should recognize they and the school board share accountability for any outcomes resulting from district policies and decision-making—even if certain board members or the superintendent disagree with the policy in public or private.³⁵ As such, superintendents should always offer well-informed recommendations to guide school board decisions that are supported by robust data, evidence-based research, and a logical theory of action.³⁶ Likewise, superintendents should thoughtfully listen to school board members' questions, concerns, and validations of presented proposals and collaborate with the full school board to develop consensus solutions that consider—but may not incorporate—the desired actions and viewpoints of all individual members.³⁷ The main idea is that superintendents and board members discuss proposals, explore differences, and work together to make decisions they all can support—or at least not actively and openly combat—to the extent possible given the political nature of the school board.³⁸

Resource Highlight

The January 2018 report “Unlocking Potential: How Political Skill Can Maximize Superintendent Effectiveness” examines the value in superintendents building and exercising political skill and power to improve their standing with the school board and build coalitions of stakeholders who support their decisions and trust their judgment. Superintendents can review this report—using the hyperlinked icon below—to expand their ability to manage conflict, lead toward consensus, and achieve success for themselves and their school district.



Source: Center for Reinventing Public Education³⁷

Cardinal Rules for Superintendents to Navigate School Board Conflicts

RULE	EXPLANATION
Realize that “sometimes the horse dies.”	Some board members will raise questions to the superintendent simply to cause controversy or garner a reaction. Superintendents should not act too quickly to challenge conflicts raised privately by individual board members. Instead, they should wait for an issue to be raised in a public meeting to allow other board members to comment or provide a majority direction.
Do not always lead the charge.	Superintendents should allow board members to confront issues with their peers rather than challenging board members themselves. If a request is unreasonable, board members will deal with their colleague.
Do not “take on a board member’s monkey.”	Sometimes board members get themselves in trouble with staff or the public over their vote or opinion on controversial issues. When they do, superintendents should not feel obligated to settle the dispute with the other parties. If a board member feels strongly about an issue, they should be able to defend their position.

MANAGE CONFLICT AND PROMOTE CONSENSUS

RULE	EXPLANATION
Put board members in conflict with facts, not yourself.	Superintendents should consistently cite data and research when making recommendations to the school board or expressing an opinion. By relying on data, the superintendent maintains focus on the facts and forces school board members to engage with those facts and/or provide countermanding facts or data.
Allow a third party to draw fire when feasible.	Many times superintendents and school board members are forced to take actions or vote on issues created by national, state, or other entities. While they may not agree with the actions, they must follow state and federal laws or mandates. When appropriate, superintendents should clarify that some issues are outside their own and the school board's control—taking some “heat” off board members and themselves.
Stick to the strategic plan.	Strategic plans quantify issues related to budget and staffing that typically create conflict between school boards and the superintendent. When an errant board member wants to go in a different direction on a given issue, the superintendent and other board members can redirect that member to the board-approved strategic plan.
Limit the scope of your responses and advice.	While superintendents should always be prepared to detail the particulars of a given recommendation or to expand their responses to board member inquiries, they should err on the side of offering discrete recommendations and responses. School board members may only need limited background, and offering more information than is required opens superintendent decisions to greater scrutiny.
Develop relationships with all board members.	Superintendents should try to allocate their time between all board members—even those they may typically disagree with—equally. While there may be some variation in how much and often a superintendent responds to <i>board member-driven</i> outreach, the superintendent should divide their own self-allocated time and attention fairly. For example, information or reports requested by one board member should be shared with all. Likewise, if a superintendent has a 30-minute meeting with one board member to discuss an issue, they should have meetings with all board members.
Understand that perception is stronger than the truth.	What a board member thinks about an issue represents <i>their</i> truth, no matter how misinformed they are about the matter. This is especially true about new board members who may have campaigned on a certain position. This necessitates superintendents listen to board members' arguments in support of their positions so they can understand why they believe what they believe. Doing so better positions a superintendent to make counterarguments or to understand when a perception cannot be changed.
Use the expertise of board members.	While all school board members may not possess intimate knowledge of K-12 education, they often have expertise and insights in other areas (e.g., healthcare, community organizing, finance) the superintendent can leverage to fill gaps in their own knowledge. Asking a board member for feedback—with caveats that their feedback will be considered alongside other information—will build good will
Build your own reputation as a community leader.	Superintendents must understand the political nature of school governance, work to establish their reputation as a leader, build a base of political capital and support from which to offer recommendations and take action. While superintendents are not elected officials themselves, school board members are. As such, a superintendent who is visible in and valued by the community will assume a stronger position than a superintendent with a limited or negative community profile.

Source: American Association of School Administrators³⁹

Tools to Apply Strategy

To support superintendents in implementing this strategy, this section includes the following tools:



School Board Member Exploratory Interview Protocol - [pp. 36-38](#)

Superintendents can use this protocol and the questions it contains to have discussions with individual school board members to identify their priorities, beliefs, and goals for the district. By asking these questions of school board members, superintendents can acquire insights into what policies and programs school board members may pursue and how those priorities, beliefs, and goals align with or deviate from the superintendents' own and those of other school board members. This will help superintendents better anticipate potential areas of conflict and disagreement and strategize productive responses to navigate conflict and disagreement.



Superintendent Program/Policy Proposal Worksheet - [pp. 39-40](#)

Superintendents can use this worksheet to plan out proposals they have for their school board regarding programs and policies. By following the embedded prompts and answering the presented questions, superintendents can articulate proposals and outline the rationale and evidence base for the school board accepting and implementing those proposals.

In addition to the tools described above, Hanover Research has composed a Collaborative Decision-Making Guide ([available here](#)) that examines three broad steps in collaborative decision-making. This resource illustrates the main objectives and provides details and suggested reflection questions for each step in the process.⁴⁰



SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Directions: Use this protocol and the questions it contains to have discussions with individual school board members to identify their priorities, beliefs, and goals for the district and your work as a superintendent. This interview should occur whenever superintendent begins working a given district, when a new board member is inaugurated, and on a set schedule for tenured board members (e.g., annually, bi-annually).

By asking these questions of school board members, you can acquire insights into what policies and programs they may pursue and how their priorities, beliefs, and goals align with or deviate from your own and those of other school board members. This will help you better anticipate potential areas of conflict and disagreement and strategize productive responses to navigate conflict and disagreement. You may record notes on school board members' responses in the provided spaces.

What are your highest priorities for how our district performs, operates, and serves various constituencies in the school community? What issues and challenges do you believe our district should devote time, energy, and resources to address?

Record notes here.

What do you currently *like* about how our district performs, operates, and serves various constituencies in the school community? What outcomes, programs, initiatives, and/or investments would you like to see us maintain over the next five years?

Record notes here.

MANAGE CONFLICT AND PROMOTE CONSENSUS

What do you currently *dislike* about how our district performs, operates, and serves various constituencies in the school community? What outcomes, programs, initiatives, and/or investments would you like to see us change and/or improve in the next five years?

Record notes here.

What strategies do you use to navigate conflict and disagreement with other school board members and with school community members? How do you ensure conflict and disagreement are managed productively and result in decisions that are made in the best interest of students and other impacted groups (e.g., teachers, families)?

Record notes here.

MANAGE CONFLICT AND PROMOTE CONSENSUS

In cases where your desired course of action does not align with that chosen by the larger school board, how do you currently/intend to acknowledge the will of the majority and support district success in this area? How will you continue to advocate for your own position while not undermining or combating my ability to execute the will of the school board majority?

Record notes here.

Before making major policy decisions, what do you need from me to ensure you feel adequately informed to make such a decision? How would you like me to articulate and defend my recommendations to you and the rest of the board—even when those recommendations may not align with your own personal views?

Record notes here.

Source: Multiple⁴¹



SUPERINTENDENT PROGRAM/POLICY PROPOSAL WORKSHEET

Directions: Use this worksheet to plan out proposals you have for your school board regarding programs and policies. Follow the prompts and answer the questions to articulate your proposal and outline the rationale and evidence base for the school board accepting and implementing your proposal. This will also support development of formal policy documentation.

In the space provided below, compose a statement of your proposal to share with your school board.

In the space provided below, explain what improvements you expect this proposal will generate and your rationale for why these improvements will occur.

MANAGE CONFLICT AND PROMOTE CONSENSUS

What research and/or evidence supports your rationale for making this proposal? Record specific data points, research studies, and other evidence in the table below. Then, draft a description or summary for each item.

DATA POINT/RESEARCH STUDY/EVIDENCE	DESCRIPTION/SUMMARY

Based on your knowledge of the school board and your district, what are potential objections and arguments that may be made against this proposal? Record specific objections and arguments in the table below and draft a counterargument for each.

ANTICIPATED OBJECTION/ARGUMENT	SUPERINTENDENT COUNTERARGUMENT

Source: Multiple⁴²

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