

SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP

THE RIGHT WAY

**A Comprehensive
Professional Resource
for School Board Members**

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Published by Best In Ed
20 F Street NW, Suite 700
Washington DC 20001
www.BestInEd.org

ISBN 979-8-218-59227-1

Library of Congress Control Number 2025900469

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First Edition

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Subsection 5.3: Hire, Fire, and Evaluate the Superintendent

Hiring, evaluating, and potentially terminating a superintendent is one of the school board's most profound responsibilities. This subsection highlights the significance of these decisions, emphasizing selection of a superintendent can shape the educational landscape of a district for years to come. The narrative begins with the critical first step—hiring a new superintendent. It underscores that this decision should not be viewed as a routine hiring process but demands a comprehensive and strategic approach. Casting a wide net and considering candidates beyond the immediate circle, boards will be able to find a leader who aligns with their vision and meets the district's unique needs.

Transitioning from one superintendent to another can be challenging, especially when the separation is contentious. Be cautious against rushing into a new hire without careful deliberation, as the situation's urgency may cloud judgment. During such transitions, it's advised to appoint an interim leader—someone trusted by the board—who can help maintain stability while searching for a permanent replacement. This approach ensures continuity in leadership and allows the board to take the necessary time to evaluate candidates and make a well-informed decision.

Subsequently, the chapter addresses the evaluation process that follows the hiring of a superintendent. This structured assessment is crucial for holding the superintendent accountable and ensuring alignment with the board's goals and expectations. The evaluation process is a formality and a governance tool designed to promote the superintendent's growth and improvement. By establishing clear criteria and objectives for evaluation, the board can foster an environment of transparency and accountability, ultimately leading to enhanced performance and better outcomes for students and the community.

is not uncommon to set a round of 15-minute interviews with each board member so they can understand the candidates' demeanor and compatibility. The board corporate and attorney will set the terms of questions and topics that might be off-limits.

Round 3 is a repeat of procedures in round 2. However, the best practice is to have a set of questions agreed upon ahead of time, with each board member having their own set of questions with a time limit for each board member's question and answer session.

Once all the interviews have been completed, the board will debate and deliberate. In a workshop or session, the board can only reach a consensus, and only during the official special meeting or business meeting can the board vote on hiring through a motion and a second.

Contract Negotiations

Once the board has cast its official vote, it will be important to review the terms of the superintendent's contract. Following this, the board will ask the consulting firm, the chair, and the attorney to negotiate a proposal on behalf of the board that will be submitted for a final vote. The board holds the superintendent accountable for the commitments made during the interview process. It is essential to document these commitments in writing, along with any "First Year Plan" the candidate may present, ensuring the candidate signs these documents. Furthermore, the contract should include clauses permitting termination if these commitments are not fulfilled. Additionally, any hiring commitments should be incorporated into the first-year evaluation of the newly appointed superintendent.

Takeaways

Approach the process with open eyes and confidence. As you go through the process of selecting a new superintendent, you must remain vigilant and informed. While the current superintendent may engage with candidates, these interactions can vary in tone and substance. Discussions about the district and individual board members may occur through various platforms, including phone calls and private meetings. Acknowledge that this is a regular part of the process.

Transparency is key; however, it's important to recognize that not all candidates may fully convey their intentions. Some may present a more polished version of themselves during the interview. Thus, you must carefully consider the authenticity of each candidate, as they are typically adept at navigating the interview process.

You might have a search firm, but do your due diligence and research the candidates. To further safeguard your decision, you must conduct a thorough background check. This includes scrutinizing media and social media presence. Investing in a reputable, independent investigator to provide a detailed report on the candidate and their family can yield invaluable insights. Additionally, never assume verbal agreements will suffice; document all critical points in writing. If a candidate needs to relocate their family to the district, ensure this is explicitly stated in the employment contract along with the potential consequences for non-compliance.

Chapter 23

Superintendent's Evaluation

What Is It?

The superintendent's evaluation is a structured process that results in an official document developed by the board. Its primary aim is to assess the superintendent's performance, which is one of the school board's key responsibilities. At its core, this evaluation enables the board to make informed decisions regarding employment. Driven by the board, when executed correctly, this process serves as an effective governance tool that can enhance the superintendent's performance and result in success for the entire school district.

Who Should Lead the Evaluation Process?

The board chair leads this effort to ensure the integrity and fairness of the evaluation process. The chair's role is to guide the board and ensure all members are actively involved, thereby maintaining fairness and integrity.

The chair ensures the board is given an overview of the process and timeline and allows outside trainers to work with the board on the primary objectives and measurables.

When a new board comes together, the chair should set a board work session to review the objectives and measurables. The board, including new and existing school board members, will decide whether to add, delete, or alter the evaluation. The employment contract might require any changes to be acceptable to the superintendent, not the board will have to wait and renegotiate the terms on the anniversary of the superintendent's review or contract date. It is the job of every board member, not just the chairman, to know the terms in the superintendent's contract.

Evaluation Tools

Some school boards are composed of former administrators and teachers, which means the evaluation might mirror more of the rubric used for education professionals and employees. On the other hand, some boards have created their own to be more direct and simplistic. Either way, it is up to the board to ensure the evaluation is fair and encapsulates its priorities for the superintendent.

We return to the Strategic Plan, Annual Budget, Capital Plan, and School Board policy blueprints, which drive the superintendent's work. If rating the superintendent on Culture and Climate is not in the policies or strategic plan, evaluating them on these issues is unacceptable.

Every board will have objectives and a unique set of measurable goals. There may be an agreed-upon framework. However, a superintendent evaluation is not a one-size-fits-all document that can be replicated from another district. It must mirror the school district's mission and vision, along with identified priorities and challenges. The evaluation is based on the issues that matter to the district's unique DNA.

Superintendent's Evaluation

Please list the objectives under the appropriate categories in the space provided below.

1st: Board priorities, goals, and objectives

2nd: Current superintendent evaluation – evaluating priorities, goals, and objectives

3rd: Compare both lists across all three categories

This exercise helps align the board's priorities with the superintendent's evaluation criteria, creating a clear path to success and growth by ensuring everyone is aligned.

Academic Bucket

The evaluation should assess whether the superintendent is driving academic success and outcomes for all students. As the lead educator and advisor for the school district, the superintendent ensures and maintains quality education. Does your evaluation align with the board's academic goals and objectives?

Common Priorities:

- Reading and Math Proficiency
- Graduation Rates
- Student Assessment Tools
- ESE Student Needs
- Student Growth

Management Bucket

The evaluation should assess the superintendent's effectiveness as a leader and manager, including systems, staff performance, and financial integrity. It highlights the importance of their skills and capacity to handle multiple responsibilities.

For Example:

- Buildings
- Buses
- Budgets
- Bonds
- Teacher Evaluations
- State Compliance
- Culture and Climate
- Staff & Parent Communication

Accountability Bucket

The evaluation is a key tool for holding the superintendent accountable, solidifying the relationship between the superintendent and the board. Each board member's evaluation carries equal weight, regardless of the board's majority or minority status.

For Example:

- Communication with the board
- Follow through on commitments
- Transparency with information
- Accessibility to the board
- Working the strategic plan

Board Academic Priorities

Board Management – Leadership Priorities

Board Accountability Priorities

Academic Priorities In the Current Superintendent Evaluation

Leadership & Management Priorities in Superintendent Evaluation

Accountability Priorities In the Current Superintendent Evaluation

The two lists should match. If not, which board academic priorities are missing from the evaluation? The following areas show misalignment with the board and evaluation process:

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SUBSECTION 5.3: HIRE, FIRE, AND EVALUATE THE SUPERINTENDENT

Purpose of the Evaluation

The ultimate goal is to determine whether the board should continue with the superintendent's contract. If yes, the superintendent's evaluation may warrant a raise. A primary outcome is the superintendent will learn from and improve in the areas evaluated.

Components of Evaluation

The evaluation process may seem complex due to the intricacies and responsibilities of a superintendent's role. However, it essentially revolves around three interconnected priorities:

1. The superintendent's ability to act as an educational leader
2. The superintendent's responsibilities as the district manager
3. The superintendent's accountability to the board

All measurable aspects can be categorized into one of these three areas.

The "Exercise" section is designed to assist board members in identifying key priorities and aligning them with the evaluation process. By listing the areas the board considers most important and necessary and comparing them with the current superintendent evaluation, board members can ensure the review aligns with the board's goals and objectives.

State Guidelines

Some states have evaluation guidelines and critical objectives to measure and evaluate the superintendent. Before drafting a new superintendent evaluation, ask the board attorney if there is anything to be aware of.

Here is an example from Virginia's code.

Legal

Code of Virginia § 22.1-60.1. Evaluation of Superintendent

Each local school board shall evaluate the division Superintendent annually, consistent with the performance objectives outlined in the Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, Administrators, and Superintendents, as required by § 22.1-253.13:5. 1999, cc. 1030, 1037; 2005, cc. 331, 450.

Evaluation Timeline

Once the board has a proper evaluation, the next step involves completing, reviewing, and submitting it. There should be a board calendar that has a timeline and a set of dates, which include:

1. Date to submit
2. Date to meet with superintendent to review
3. Date the evaluations are shared with the board
4. Date to review evaluations as a board
5. Date the superintendent's contract is up for review (determines next steps)

The chair leads the board on these matters; if not prescribed, responsibility should be identified in policy. Don't wait for it to just happen. The contract renewal should not be on the agenda before the board can evaluate the superintendent's performance. Questions must be asked in advance.

6. Other Details

Other Evaluation Details to Consider

- *Should evaluation be sent directly to the **board chair, board clerk, or superintendent?***
- Who do you submit the evaluation to?

- Reviewing this evaluation one-on-one with the superintendent is customary. Who will set these meetings?



Board Member's Exercises

Exercise 6

Evaluation Process

A good chairman will lead the process of keeping the board on track. The chair and the board clerk should work together to ensure an adequate timeline is put in place and the board is informed of important deadlines and next steps. The board clerk will have institutional knowledge based on experience, but it will be up to members to ensure processes are in place. It's important to be proactive especially if you have a lax chairman and understanding the process will allow you to properly plan.