
Part IV:

Superintendent Evaluation

The Evaluation Process

The evaluation process begins with the selection of the superintendent. If the board members have been thorough and thoughtful in the selection process, they have engaged in an appraisal of singular significance (many regard the hiring of the superintendent as the single most important decision the board makes). The criteria developed at the time of hire will need to be reviewed as part of the process of evaluation. The remaining steps include:

1. The board formalizes evaluation plans by adopting a policy statement which includes what the board wants the evaluation to accomplish and the evaluation process to be followed.
2. The school board adopts a job description for the superintendent that spells out his/her responsibilities. The job description helps provide a foundation for the superintendent's evaluation by identifying the tasks expected.
3. The board develops criteria which relate to the job description. The performance expectations of the board must be clearly understood by both the board and superintendent.
4. Annual goals must be clearly set, and each goal-supporting activity needs a schedule to identify progress toward goal achievement. The board defines district goals for the ensuing year.
5. The board and superintendent together develop the procedure and timeline for the evaluation.
6. The school board selects the evaluation instrument that is best suited to its needs.
7. The school board, with input from the superintendent, determines the types and forms of data to be collected for evaluation. The superintendent collects the documentation and makes it available to the board according to the established timeline.
8. The board reviews documentation, including progress reports of the superintendent.
9. The board conducts a formal evaluation of the superintendent before the date specified in the contract or policy.
10. The board and superintendent establish tentative district goals for the following year including goals for the professional development of the superintendent.

Who Develops the Superintendent Evaluation Plan?

Whether starting from “scratch” or revising an existing plan of evaluation, a sound approach is to involve both the evaluated and the evaluator in the development process. Thus, while the board ultimately acts to adopt an evaluation plan for the superintendent, its development should be a joint one between the two parties.

When a school district has a strong emphasis upon the leadership team concept, comprised of the governance team (board) and the management team (superintendent and administrative cabinet), the plan for evaluating the superintendent should reflect this fact. Under such circumstances, it is likely that members of the management team, in addition to the superintendent, will have some role to play in the development process. The process of development would ensure, insofar as possible, that all parties understand and agree with the purposes, the methodology, the validity and the fairness of the approach being taken.

Preparing for the Evaluation

In preparing for the development of an evaluation process the board and superintendent should take the time to answer the following questions.

1. What are we legally required to do?

2. What is our ethical responsibility to the community to account for the performance of the board and superintendent?

3. What purpose will the evaluation serve? Information regarding progress toward goals? Support? Guidance? Improved performance? Better effectiveness?

4. What role will each board member and the superintendent have in developing and carrying through the evaluation process?

5. How can we focus on measures of performance?

6. What resources do we have for developing valid evaluation tools?

7. How will we use the results of the evaluation? For performance appraisal? As a guidance tool? For goal assessment? To indicate needed changes?

Steps to the Superintendent Performance Evaluation

To assure the successful evaluation of the superintendent, adhere to the following steps:

1. Develop a job description for the superintendent.
2. Develop criteria which relate to the job description.
3. Define school district goals for the ensuing year.
4. Review the work plan of the superintendent to accomplish the goals of the district (performance indicators, proposed activities, cost, timelines).
5. Review progress reports of the superintendent.
6. Conduct an informal evaluation of the superintendent based upon established criteria (mid-year).
7. Conduct a formal evaluation of the superintendent (before date specified in contract or policy).
8. Establish tentative goals for the following year.

Common Errors in the Superintendent Evaluation

Two common errors in evaluating superintendents are:

- the “no news is good news” approach, in which an evaluation is avoided until a crisis occurs; and,

- the “ax-grinding” assessment, in which board members use evaluation to express “pet peeves” or to harass the superintendent for personal reasons.

The National School Boards Association listed the mistakes most frequently made by local boards in assessing superintendents:

- undertaking the evaluation without a clear understanding of what the superintendent should be doing;
- evaluating in a vacuum;
- thinking of evaluation only in terms of correcting deficiencies;
- failing to acknowledge and reward good work;
- measuring performance without carefully constructed standards;
- posturing as psychologists;
- not providing a forum in which the superintendent can respond to the board’s evaluation;
- not providing time for the superintendent to correct deficiencies before acting on them;
- assuming that the longer the evaluation form, the better it is.

The Methodology of the Superintendent Evaluation

Choosing a methodology for evaluating the superintendent will involve your board in a study of the options available for evaluation and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Selecting the method of evaluation, while important, is only the tip of the iceberg. However, the most important aspect of evaluation is the delineation of what precisely is to be appraised.

Knowing what to evaluate is the key to deciding how. The first direction your board should turn in developing an evaluation process should be inward. Have the board first decide:

What do we expect the superintendent to accomplish?

Have our goals, policies, direction and budget allocations made this possible?

Does our superintendent's job description cover our expectations?

What has the superintendent been doing that's right?

In what areas does the superintendent need to improve?

Once your board has a clear fix on where it is going with its process, it can decide which process is suitable.

Determining a Suitable Process

There are four processes commonly used by school boards to evaluate their superintendents:

- Checklist/rating systems
- Written essays
- Objectives analysis
- Performance appraisal

Following is a brief summary of how each works and what your board can and cannot expect for each to accomplish.

Checklist/Rating Systems

By far the most commonly applied evaluation method among school boards, the checklist/rating tool has two basic components. The checklist calls for a series of judgments on specific areas of the superintendent's—or the district's performance. Example: Does the superintendent keep the board fully informed on all aspects of the school system?

Accompanying the checklist is either a Yes-No answer column or a rating scale that usually provides numerical weighting (EXCELLENT – 5, GOOD – 4, FAIR – 3, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT – 2, POOR – 1) to quantify how well the superintendent is performing individual functions.

Strengths

The principal advantages of this process are speed, the opportunity for a wide variety of questions or judgments, identification of areas needing improvement, simplicity, the impersonality of the process and flexibility.

Weaknesses

The major weaknesses of the process are its reliance on totally subjective ratings, ambiguity in the meaning of "Good" or "Excellent" and other terms and the

imbalance in the weight or importance of various questions.

Written Essays

Although not as widely used as checklist/rating systems, written essays do assist many boards in evaluating their superintendents. "Essay Evaluation" narratives rely on each board member writing a detailed statement about the superintendent's performance, focusing on strengths and weaknesses. Example: "In the area of communication with the board, I find you to be generally open and candid. However, there is a tendency for you to be hard-headed when you disagree. And although I feel well-briefed on some issues, I sometimes have a sense that you're holding back one or two key details. I feel that giving the board the good and the bad news would strengthen our relationship and provide the board with a more complete basis for action."

As you develop your narrative statements, keep the tone positive. A little flattery goes a long way. Tell your superintendent what he/she is doing correctly. Use the "catch more flies with honey than vinegar" approach to point out negatives. Suggest ways his/her weaknesses can be overcome and his/her relationship with the board improved.

Once the board has compiled its written narratives, the next step in the essay evaluation is to have the superintendent respond. Some boards require a written response from the superintendent. The process is completed in a meeting at which the board members and superintendent discuss the content of the narratives and try to agree on what is to be done to continue the successes and to correct any weaknesses.

Strengths

The major strengths of the written essay evaluation are its tendency to compel the board to focus on

many dimensions of the district's performance, the opportunity it gives to address matters of personality in a fairly impersonal manner and its ability to provide a basis for discussion in a relatively short period of time.

Weaknesses

The principal weakness of the written narrative are unequal weighting of procedural and personal matters, the likelihood that some statements will be ambiguous and the fact that some board members just aren't comfortable when it comes to writing.

Your board's goals, policies, programs and the superintendent's job description are the best sources for narrative topics.

Objective Analysis

Objective analysis is an evaluation process in which the superintendent, with the help of the board, puts into writing the things he/she plans to accomplish in the year ahead. The board and superintendent decide how much of the work is to be completed in each quarter of the year and set up a reporting or monitoring schedule.

As applied to most school districts, objective analysis involves three major activities. First, the board and superintendent determine the objectives and weigh each in terms of how important it is. Then they negotiate a rough schedule of how much progress should be made toward each objective during each reporting period. At the end of a reporting period an informal assessment is made.

The second phase is the completion of an annual review. Normally, the performance evaluation is objectively scored on the basis of what has been accomplished.

The third and final step in the process is to develop the next year's evaluation of objectives or criteria. The board and superintendent should assess uncompleted objectives and determine if these should be carried over for completion in the following year. The time to do this is while these matters are fresh and already under discussion. New objectives can be added and some priorities might be modified.

Strengths

The major advantages of objective analysis are task orientation, a built-in system to alert the board and superintendent any time they are falling behind schedule, ongoing evaluation through regularly scheduled checkpoints, and a high degree of personal involvement for both parties and specific accountability on a task-by-task basis.

Weaknesses

The principal disadvantages of objective analysis are the rigidity of the stated objectives (objective analysis tasks might be accomplished while other items of business are ignored), the reliance on documentation and record keeping and the danger that the board's goals will be too vague or philosophical to translate into specific objectives.

Performance Appraisals

As it is currently being used by many school districts, performance appraisal is something of a cross between the checklist/rating system and objective analysis. In essence, the process is used to help the board make a judgment on how board policy is being translated into hard results by the superintendent and his/her staff. Many board members say they prefer this method because it is a process that focuses on both the person and his/her ability to get the work done. One executive with a state school boards association explains: "In (rating scale and objective analysis) evaluations, it's easy to focus on one area of concern. A superintendent might have great communication skills, but not be getting anything done – or vice versa. Performance appraisal will measure exceptional skill in human relations and task achievement."

An advantage in performance appraisal is that it forces the school board to decide what its superintendent's job really is. As one board member notes, "Without knowing what the superintendent is supposed to do, it is impossible to evaluate how effectively he or she is doing it."

Here's a step-by-step method which your board can use to apply the performance appraisal technique:

1. Determine what the board expects the superintendent and staff to accomplish.

2. Determine how the school system will use its human and monetary resources.
3. Clarify the roles of the board members and superintendent in accomplishing the board's priorities.
4. Identify problems in the superintendent's past performance and areas that need improvement.
5. Specify priorities for items the board and superintendent have agreed to change, improve or accomplish.
6. Write objectives for the top priority items, setting out who will do it.
7. Establish a timetable for the board and superintendent to review progress toward the objectives.

Standards for the Superintendent

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has developed eight professional standards for the superintendent. These standards delineate the essential job requirements of the superintendent position.

Performance Indicators/Targets

Each standard has performance indicators or targets that provide the rater – a school board member –

evidence of the degree of attainment of the standard. The performance indicators or targets are stated in measurable terms.

Superintendent Goals

Goal statements are then drafted for each standard. The goals are stated more globally in terms of the comprehensive school improvement plan. By this method, the goal statement for each standard is then incorporated into the evaluation document and becomes a part of the evaluation process.

In order to complete the evaluation process, your board should develop three documents: (1) a statement of what the board wants to accomplish through a planned appraisal of the superintendent, (2) a policy concerning the evaluation of the superintendent, and (3) a formal evaluation procedure.

Strengths

The major advantage of performance appraisal is its "best of all worlds" approach to systematic evaluation of the superintendent.

Weaknesses

Its major disadvantage is that it takes considerable time and effort to develop and implement.

The Evaluation Material

Since any evaluation of a superintendent's performance focuses on what the board wants to accomplish for the district, a number of questions must be answered: what does the law say the district must do; what are the superintendent's roles and responsibilities to the district; how well has he or she done the job? There are several materials that can assist a board in answering these questions and move it through a well planned and executed performance evaluation of its superintendent.

- 1. A statement of the district's goals and priorities.** The board should compile such a statement, taking into account board policies, the district's educational philosophy, the needs of the community and all state and federal laws or regulations applicable to the district.
- 2. The employment contract.** The board establishes criteria for the hiring of the superintendent. These criteria along with the employment contract should also be reviewed and considered in the evaluation process.
- 3. The superintendent's job description.** The board must spell out clearly the roles and responsibilities the chief executive has in carrying out board goals and priorities. The job description should determine how much actual power the superintendent has to complete his/her work. A fair evaluation must be defined by the limits of this job summary.
- 4. A written evaluation procedure.** The board and the superintendent must arrive at an agreeable structure for evaluation, including timetables, procedural mechanics and the criteria under which judgment will be made.
- 5. The appraisal instrument.** The board should review several appraisal instruments and select the instrument best suited to their evaluation procedures and situation.
- 6. Other pertinent documentation.** There may be other sources of information that would assist the board in the evaluation, such as the superintendent's progress reports or the superintendent's annual self-appraisal that describes the progress toward completion of goals, as well as specific emphasis on competencies in various administrative functions.

Checklist for the Evaluation

Use this checklist to ensure that your board covers all the bases when evaluating its superintendent.

- The goals/standards or criteria by which the superintendent's performance is to be judged are understood by both the superintendent and the members of the board.
- The board has agreed with the superintendent on a time and place for the evaluation.
- The board has specified that no other matters of business will be on the agenda for this meeting.
- The board is assured that all of its members will attend.
- All members understand that their individual assessments of the superintendent will be compiled into a final composite evaluation which will be discussed between the superintendent and the whole board.
- The board has established criteria which will evaluate both strengths and weaknesses.
- The board and the superintendent have agreed that the evaluation will become a regularly scheduled event to occur at least once each year.
- Both the board and the superintendent will participate. The board will assess the superintendent according to the agreed-upon goals/standards or criteria; the superintendent will use the same goals/standards or criteria as a basis for self-evaluation.
- There is an understanding that when evaluation forms are used, the board still might wish to address other matters (to which the superintendent will also have a fair opportunity to respond).
- The board and superintendent have decided on a method of evaluation.
- The final evaluation will be in writing and an adequate, objective documentation of all conclusions will be provided.
- There is an understanding between the parties that, in some cases, judgment criteria might be deleted from the process because extenuating circumstances might have precluded the superintendent from performing the function. Example: In-service training was given a high priority, but was interrupted by a teachers' strike.

Conducting the Performance Evaluation

- 1. Give the review the status it deserves.**
Remember, the superintendent is here to help the board get the job done.
 - Conduct it in executive session.
 - Make it important ahead of time.
 - Take sufficient time (if needed, in more than one meeting).
- 2. Focus on current performance, not personality.** What he/she has done and must do, not what he/she is.
- 3. Ask the superintendent for self-evaluation.**
Remember, effective evaluations encourage participation and two-way communication.
- 4. Identify strong points of performance.**
Development planning should build on strengths, not overcoming weaknesses.
- 5. Clarify weak points of results.** "Tact" is important, but honesty is essential.
The superintendent should understand what is being done poorly and why.
- 6. Consider the "How" of performance as well as the "What" of performance.** Dwell on problem solving, not conclusion reporting. What needs to be achieved? How can it be achieved? Not simply telling him/her what to do.
- 7. Blend organizational and personal needs to identify new responsibilities.** A plan should be developed based on the performance evaluation which would incorporate the professional development needs of the superintendent with the goals and needs of the district.
- 8. Offer the board's advice and support.**
- 9. Conclude the evaluation.** Know when to stop.

Superintendent Action and Professional Development Plan

After completing the superintendent's evaluation a plan should be established for the coming year. This plan should include the superintendent's goals for the coming year, both for performance and for professional development. This is the time for modification of priorities and the establishment of new goals. Both the board and superintendent should agree on any modifications or new goals.

Goal

Action Step (how)

Completed (when)

Evidence of Success:

Professional Development Goals:
