



SCHOOL BOARD HIRING & FOCUS AREAS FOR NEW SUPERINTENDENTS

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Introduction

School boards have both the privilege and responsibility to hire the district superintendent. Whether it is formal or informal, the board must consider what they want in a new district leader. Often what they are looking for are qualifications they value in their current leader and others that they don't feel like their current superintendent possesses. For the purposes of consistency in this report, we use the term desired qualifications for those personal and professional traits the board is looking for in the new superintendent and topic area first year superintendents report spending the most time on during their first year in the role.

Professional Desired Qualifications

Desired qualifications from the school board	Reported topics by first year superintendents
Building school and community relations	Building school and community relations
Ability to lead school improvement efforts	Developing and modeling a vision for the district
Effectively manages district resources	Effectively managing district resources
Visible in the school and community	Working with the administrative team
Instructional leadership	Instructional leadership

Building School & Community Relations

There are many similarities to what school boards want in their new superintendent and what superintendents report working on in their first year. One of those common areas include building school and community relations which also includes being visible in the community. It seems that often that the school board wants the district leader to be known in both the district and around the community. This gives the new superintendent permission to get out of the office and be visible, build relationships and make connections. This is clearly both a top priority for the board but also an area where superintendents seem to be responding. As superintendents make time to get out of the office they should be cautioned to make sure district stakeholders know this is a goal area for them and still have to get management duties completed after the regular contact day. Often is a new superintendent that follows a superintendent that was infrequently out of the office will lose trust internally if they aren't very intentional about their time in schools and the larger community.

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Effectively Managing District Resources

Superintendents also report a focus on effectively managing district resources which include staff and managing the budget. This may go without saying, but the board expects the superintendent to understand the district's financial condition and make recommendations on both staffing and spending. It often takes time for a new superintendent to understand the district's budget line items. It also takes time for the new leader to figure out how buildings are staffed and make recommendations on where personnel may be more efficient and effective around the district. At times, state or local funding may change and require a district leader to navigate both financial and staffing constraints. Based on the findings of this survey, it is clear that focusing on district finances and staff is both desired by the board and lived by the district superintendent.



Instructional Leadership

Superintendents must be good managers of district resources but they also must be strong instructional leaders. This is a desired qualification of the board and also a topic that new superintendents report focusing on during their first year in a new school district. Superintendents report instructional leadership including reviewing student achievement data, planning professional development for teachers, and leading learning for the building principals.

Developing & Modeling a Vision

Areas that superintendents report spending considerable time and focus that tended not to be initially prioritized by the board were developing and modeling a vision for the district and working with the administrative team. Developing and modeling a vision for the district is important for the new superintendent since they are the face of the district and have the authority to align district resources to support the districts vision. Working with the administrative and teacher leadership team is also a must for the new district superintendent because these are the leaders in the district. The new superintendents needs support from these building leaders. Together they shape the vision and direction for the district and these two topics clearly align.

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Leading School Improvement Efforts

One specific desired qualifications that school boards tend to want in a new district leader that was not reported directly by first year superintendent was around leading school improvement efforts. This could be for various reasons. One reason might be that the new superintendent is still learning about the district and what efforts are already underway. Other factors could be focusing on understanding the district's financial position and reviewing leverage points when determining school improvement strategies. There is no doubt that superintendents play an important role in leading school improvement efforts but it may not be a top focus during their first year in a new district.

Personal Desired Qualifications

There are also personal qualifications that school boards want in their new district leader. Often times the personal qualifications a board is looking for in a new leader are more important to them than the professional qualifications. Again, there are similarities and differences to what the board prioritizes in the new leader and what the new leader actually lives their first year in a new district based on our data.

Personal qualifications from the school board	Reported topics by first year superintendents
Is approachable and open-minded	Being accessible and open to ideas and suggestions
Demonstrates collaborative leadership	Demonstrating collaborative leadership
Brings out Success in Others	Modeling high expectations for self and others
Follows-through on tasks and responsibilities	Leveraging communication skills

Approachable & Accessible

Common areas that school boards were looking for and superintendents lived in their first year were being approachable and accessible and demonstrating collaborative leadership. Since these were top priorities for the new leader it is good that these areas align. This conveys that who the board hired was the right person who took the feedback from the hiring process and listened. Collaborative leadership demonstrates that the new leader comes in and is intentional about working with other people, learning from them, and collaborating with them, rather than make top down decisions. This also means that their first year goals give them permission to spend time and energy on top priorities such as being accessible demonstrating collaborative leadership.

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Modeling High Expectations for Self & Others

Modeling high expectations themselves and others is a focus area new superintendents report spending much time and attention. This is unique from what the board prioritized before hiring a new superintendent. The board often wants a leader who others want to follow. They seek a dynamic leader who has high integrity and will set the bar high for the rest of the stakeholders in the district.

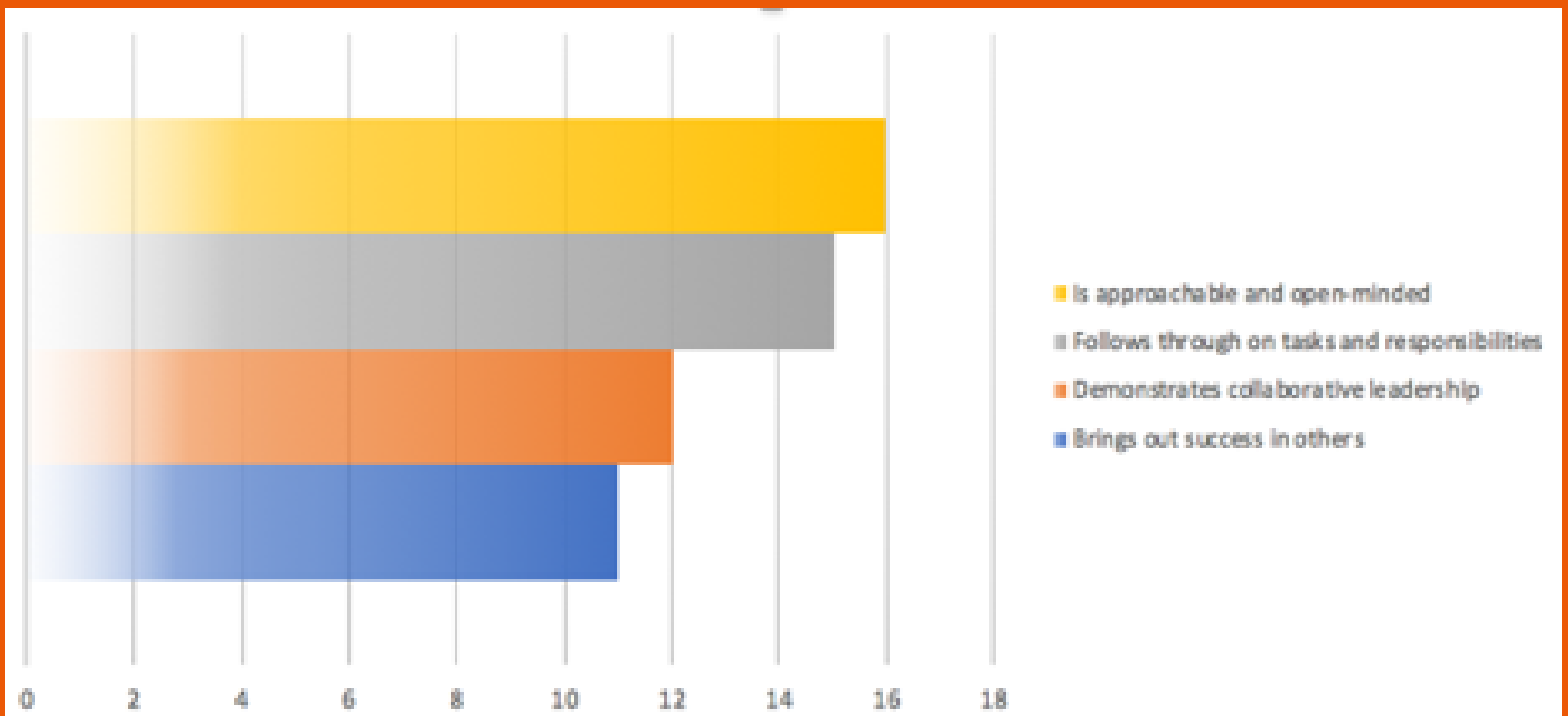
Leveraging Communication Skills

Leveraging communication skills is also a top priority that new superintendents report focusing on that is also unique from what the school board may have prioritized. Almost every district wants a new leader to stimulate new and better ways to connecting and communicating with the various stakeholders throughout the district. This includes social media which is changing rapidly and meeting the needs of a diverse population of preferences. Clearly communicating with those closest to them in the district as well as a larger audience is necessary and a top topic for new superintendents. Both written and verbal communication is part of the leader sharing their vision, promoting the district and providing updates about the district to those they serve.

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Follow Through on Tasks & Bring out Success in Others

Following through on tasks and responsibilities and bringing out success in others are two desired qualifications that new superintendents did not report as spending as much time and attention on as the board might have prioritized. Perhaps following through on tasks and empowering others may be a responsibility of the superintendent without making it a priority. However, it is often prioritized because it was in issue with the prior leader. So, for many new superintendents following through on their tasks and responsibilities and motivating others to help them be successful is part of their natural leadership abilities.



Conclusion

Many new district leaders actually start engaging in their new district before they are even on contract. Some of these transitional activities include board meetings, budgeting, hiring processes and policy review. First year superintendents report that areas that are most helpful to know before they are on contract include getting to know the administrative team, understanding the district's financial condition, reviewing district policies, setting first year goals and understanding the superintendent evaluation process. Ways that the board can address these areas for their new leader are to include them on goal setting, have them be part of the budgeting process, include them on policy review discussions and invite them to meet with the administrative team. Obviously, the sooner the new superintendent is hired the easier it is to include them and ensure a smooth transition into the district.

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Even though there are differences in what the school board may prioritize in desired qualifications for the new district leader and where the new leader spends their time and attention their first year, the relationship between them is crucial. Superintendents are only as effective as the school boards that support and guide them and school boards will only be as productive as the superintendents that advise and involve them. This can and will continue to be done with clear goals, honest conversations, aligning time and resources to the needs of the district.

About the Author

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Trent is the founder of Grundmeyer Leader Services LLC. Prior to his tenure at Drake University serving as an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, he served as a high school principal at Hampton-Dumont and Indianola High School. Trent was recognized as 2013 Secondary Principal of the Year by the School Administrators of Iowa organization. He earned his doctorate degree in educational leadership at Iowa State University in 2013 and focuses much of his research around technology integration and leadership.

Trent has many connections around the state and Midwest which provides and advantages to the districts he serves through the recruiting and hiring process. Grundmeyer Leader Search continues to grow based on Trent's integrity in the search process ensuring that the leader who gets hired is truly the best fit for the job.

