



INSIGHTS TOWARD SUCCESSFUL SUPERINTENDENT TRANSITIONS


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The superintendent position is similar to a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in the business world. The actions and responsibilities of superintendents, like a CEO, must possess a wide variety of leadership skills. Unfortunately, there is a small amount of literature on action steps and strategies after a new superintendent is officially hired to successfully transition into their new position. The aim of this white paper is to share some effective strategies for both current and new superintendent to ensure a smooth transition.



THE TRANSITION

One of the most important responsibilities of local school boards is to hire a new superintendent. From the resignation of the outgoing superintendent to the hiring of a new superintendent, a lot of time and resources are allocated by the school and community to determine the best candidate for the district. Ensuring the new superintendent has success in the new position depends on a successful transition from one superintendent to the next. An incoming superintendent, in conjunction with the school board and district stakeholders, must have a purposeful plan of entry to ensure a smooth transition and get off to a good start in their new role.

BE INTENTIONAL



According to [Art Stellar in a School Administrator article in 2011](#), "One purpose of this compilation is to start assessing how to outline your entry plan, to market yourself and to identify what actions are needed shortly after your arrival. How do you want to be perceived? What is the community expecting? Do you want to start out being seen as strong and decisive or collaborative and incremental? Should you position yourself as a superintendent with an open-door policy or one who spends time out of the office at community activities and schools? You have a choice on where to place your attention."

DEVELOPING AN ENTRY PLAN

The purpose of an entry plan is to establish a "roadmap" guiding the superintendent's transition. An entry plan may be required in some districts or be a foreign concept to other school board members and community stakeholders. An entry plan is not developed by the new superintendent on their own. Working closely and collaboratively with others to develop and implement an entry plan is crucial to the success of the superintendent. The time frame for a superintendent entry plan may vary, but the most common length is the first 90 days beginning on the first day of a superintendent's contract (July 1).

Development of the entry plan should begin with the superintendent meeting with a couple representatives of the school board (board president and/or vice-president) or the entire school board. Some topics to discuss would be: District's vision, goals, issues, and board expectations during the transition and throughout the first year.

Feedback from a superintendent transitioning into a new school district, "It was always great to be able to take a few days to go to the new district and start meeting with people and see normal operations before I was on contract. This is not always possible but the more you can go to the new district and talk with people the more smooth the transition usually is." If the entire school board plans to provide feedback, a closed session will allow board members to speak openly about school district topics as well as ensure confidentiality of sensitive topics.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

1. What are you most proud of in your school?
2. What initiatives are going on in your school?
3. What is the culture like in your school?
4. What support do you need from me?
5. What concerns or challenges do you forecast?
6. What advice would you offer me to be successful in the district?

“I felt like the communication between the board president and the SBO was great. They would answer any and all of my questions. I did get to spend one-on-one time with each of them prior to my start date.” (New Superintendent)

TRANSITION MEETINGS

In addition to gathering feedback from school board members, meetings with the outgoing superintendent may be valuable to learn about the board, community, staff, monthly tasks, ongoing issues, strengths/initiatives in the district, and a plan to transition into the new office space. Feedback from an Iowa superintendent "Part of what went well in the transition was the outgoing superintendent's willingness to sit down and discuss where the district was at, future projects, identifying possible challenges and talking about trying to tie up some on-going projects." Before meeting with the outgoing superintendent, request approval from the school board. Depending on the relationship between the school board and the outgoing superintendent, some school boards may not support the idea. Another superintendent stated, "The outgoing superintendent was extremely supportive and made time to talk with me, meet with me 1-on-1 and begin introductions with stakeholders. While both of us still had full-time jobs, I knew they were a phone call or email away."

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KEY TRANSITION QUESTIONS

1. What has the district accomplished during your tenure ?
2. What are core values of the school district that must be maintained no matter who the superintendent is?
3. What initiatives are in progress that I should know about?
4. Describe the current relationship with the administrative team and teachers union?
5. Are there any contract terms that you would recommend the board or I should address?
6. What tasks should I focus my attention on in the first 90 days?
7. What challenges do you think the new superintendent will face their first year?
8. Are we meeting the needs of all students?
9. Who do I need to meet in the district and community that are key stakeholders?
10. What advice would you give me to be successful?



STRATEGIC
TRANSITION !!



STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Collecting critical information from key school district stakeholders is important to fully develop a comprehensive 90 day entry plan. Key stakeholders groups may include district leadership team, central office staff, principals, employee groups, professional associations, parent groups, community leaders, student groups, and community organizations. A new superintendent talked about gathering information during the transition period saying, "It was a benefit to visit the new school district and meet with different people before I officially started the job. I learned a lot about the district when I asked the right questions and just listened." A successful entry plan includes visibility throughout the district, using a team approach, involving people in decisions, listening to school stakeholder needs, and building relationships with school and the community. Normally, the more people you can meet and the more visible you are in the district and community the better received you will be as the new district leader.

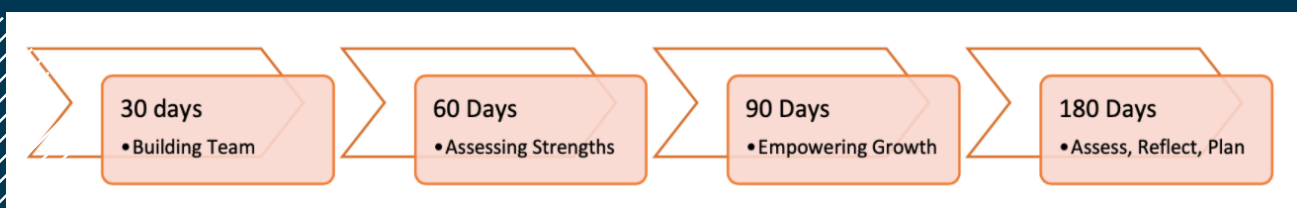


THE REWARDS

Transitioning to a new position, new community, new school district can be challenging. How a superintendent begins their career in a new school district can determine success or failure. Successful leaders work together with school board members, the outgoing superintendent, and community stakeholders to move the district in the right direction.

A dissertation study by Pochintesta (2020) concluded that superintendents who developed entry plans learned about their organizations, established relationships, fostered trust with the community by publicly sharing their entry plan, and set a standard of transparency.

Visiting the new district to start meeting stakeholders, a well-planned superintendent entry plans and getting answers to key transition questions will increase the chances of a positive start in a new school district, improve the likelihood of personal/professional satisfaction, and provide a sharper focus to lead the school district.



RESOURCES

Grundmeyer Leader Services (GLS) provides several entry plan resources for new superintendents on the website.

Topics from the page called Resources for New Hires:

- Administrative team or board retreat service
- Superintendent evaluation resources
- Research articles about administrator portfolios/entry plans
- Sample entry plans
- Articles for new superintendents
- Iowa school finance information from Iowa School Finance Information Services website and consultants (ISFIS)



The School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) provides one year of programming to support the Iowa standards for first-year school superintendents (not veteran superintendents transitioning to a new district). SAI assigns an experienced and high-quality administrator in a comparable position as a mentor for the mentee (SAI selects and assigns the mentor). The mentor is expected to provide regular contact with the mentee through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, email or other technology.

The Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) serves Iowa school boards and public schools. IASB provides important support services for roles that work closely with boards: superintendents, business officials, board secretaries and school attorneys.

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has a program designed to help transitioning superintendents succeed in their new roles. The training provides hands-on support for facilitating district leadership teams, superintendent skills and knowledge, and how to create an entry plan. Also, AASA has a New Superintendents E-Journal which is a quarterly electronic newsletter written specifically for those who are in their first months and years of the superintendency.

Grundmeyer Leader Services

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Leader at a Time*

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For more resources visit
www.grundmeyerleadersearch.com

