

The Superintendent Evaluation Process

*Strengthening the Board/
Superintendent Relationship*

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About This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help the school board develop a superintendent evaluation process that supports effective leadership for the district. There is no one method to evaluate a superintendent; therefore IASB suggests a best practices approach. The objective is to establish a process that promotes district improvement and provides professional development and growth opportunity.

For a school board that has not yet established a process for evaluating the superintendent, this guide will suggest steps to follow. Developing such a process for the first time will admittedly require substantial time and effort from both the board and superintendent. However, the time and energy will, be worth it in the long run by clarifying expectations, establishing a framework for productive discussions, and strengthening the board/superintendent relationship. For a board that already has a process in place, this guide will provide an opportunity to review and assess current practices to make any refinements that may be desired.

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Introduction

As trustee for its community, the school board needs to recognize how critical the board/superintendent relationship is to the ultimate success of its district's schools. The *Foundational Principles of Effective Governance* serves as the Illinois Association of School Boards' primary document to explain the role of school board members in their district. (The complete document is contained in **Appendix D**.) The third principle — The Board Employs a Superintendent — imposes the following duties on the board:

- The board employs and evaluates one person — the superintendent — and holds that person accountable for district performance and compliance with written board policy.
- An effective school board develops and maintains a productive relationship with the superintendent.
- The employment relationship consists of mutual respect and a clear understanding of respective roles, responsibilities, and expectations. This relationship should be grounded in a thoughtfully crafted employment contract and job description; procedures for communications and ongoing assessment; and reliance on written board policy.

Having hired the superintendent as its chief executive officer, the board delegates authority to him or her to operate the district and provide leadership to staff. Delegating authority empowers the superintendent and staff to pursue board ends — its mission, vision, and goals — single mindedly and without hesitation. Having delegated the authority, the board has the responsibility to monitor performance, ensuring that the district is making progress towards its ends and is in compliance with written board policy. The superintendent evaluation process is the most visible and arguably the most important monitoring work in which the board can engage.

Why then do boards sometimes feel the superintendent evaluation process to be so daunting? Some board members feel intimidated in assessing the performance of a trained, professional educator, who often has advanced degrees and considerable experience. Some board members view the process as dissatisfying because they believe it does not allow them the opportunity for an open and honest dialogue. Still others are afraid of conflict and avoid the process all together.

William Nemir, director of leadership team services for the Texas Association of School Boards with over 30 years of experience working with boards and superintendents, writes, “board member dread is usually a sign that the board's evaluation process is not fully developed — that the board and superintendent have not done the necessary ‘up-front’ work at the beginning of the process to clarify expectations of the superintendent and build those expectations clearly into the evaluation instrument.”

This guide will assist the local school board in addressing these and other challenges with a fresh look at superintendent evaluation. It is designed to assist a board and superintendent in fully developing their superintendent evaluation process — a process that should be fully owned and led collaboratively by the board of education and the superintendent. This allows the board to monitor superintendent performance, guide the district toward continuous improvement, and develop and maintain an effective relationship between the superintendent and the entire board of education.



SCHEDULE EVALUATION ON CALENDAR

Why Conduct a Superintendent Evaluation?

The school board that fully understands its governance role will see four compelling reasons for conducting regular superintendent evaluations: (1) a means for ensuring accountability, (2) an opportunity to strengthen the board/superintendent relationship, (3) a structured way for the board to impact superintendent professional development, and (4) as a tool in determining salary and contract considerations.

Reason No. 1: Accountability.

A focus on performance starts at the top. The board, as trustee for its community, has the responsibility to keep the district focused on achieving the goals it has articulated, based on the community's aspirations and vision for its schools. Additionally, its fiduciary responsibility obligates the board to ensure that its schools are well run and effectively managed.

Reason No. 2: Board/superintendent relationship.

An effective board continually works to maintain a professional relationship with its superintendent. In their day-to-day relationship, board members and the superintendent are generally collegial and friendly. However, the board, as employer of its chief executive officer, ultimately has the obligation to judge performance. Fundamental fairness requires that the superintendent know what is expected and "how am I doing?" A thorough evaluation process allows the board to answer that question and to address any weaknesses or discuss any differences in a professional manner and in an appropriate forum.

Reason No. 3: Superintendent professional development.

Superintendents, like most professionals in positions of leadership, are always looking for ways to improve their craft and receive constructive feedback on their performance. The board, as employer, has an obligation to provide its district's chief executive officer with such opportunities for his or her own professional growth, as well as ensuring that the superintendent has the skills necessary to lead the district. A thorough evaluation process will help align professional development activities with mutually agreed upon superintendent performance goals.

An Important Prerequisite

Before the board can effectively engage in the development of a superintendent evaluation process, it is extremely important that the board undertake an examination of its own performance.

A board takes responsibility for its own work and behavior, reviews its role and decision-making processes, examines its own strengths and weaknesses, holds itself accountable, and creates a climate of continuous improvement — all of which is essential for a successful relationship with and appraisal of the superintendent.

Best practice suggests that a board engage in an annual self-evaluation sometime prior to the annual formal superintendent evaluation. (See [Sample Calendar for Superintendent Evaluation Activities](#), Appendix C.)

IASB field services directors are available to facilitate such a discussion, and will make every effort to meet the specific needs of the board. The Illinois Open Meetings Act allows boards to meet in closed session for the purpose of self-evaluation, “when meeting with representative of statewide association of which the public body is a member.” ILCS 120/2(c)(16).

Reason No 4: Contractual and compensation considerations.

The superintendent’s evaluation often assists the board in making informed decisions about the superintendent’s contract and compensation. In addition, by law, the board and superintendent must include performance goals in any multi-year contract and the board must evaluate the superintendent’s performance toward those goals. (For more on *Superintendent Employment and the Law*, see [Appendix B](#).) However, the evaluation process and contract and compensation issues do not necessarily need to occur in conjunction with each other. The board that views the superintendent evaluation as a part of the overall district planning process rather than merely a means of justifying contract renewal will view the evaluation as more than a precursor to contract discussions.

How to Effectively Start the Process

Defined Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships

In order for a superintendent evaluation process to be effective, all parties must know their roles, the roles of the other players, and the responsibilities they have to one another. A strong relationship between the board and the superintendent is one wherein each party values the other’s contributions, practices open communication, and understands the complex nature of our educational system.

For the board:

Members need to know the unique role they play as employer to the superintendent. First, the board has a responsibility to speak with one clear voice to the superintendent regarding its expectations for his or her work. Second, as trustees for the community, the board has the obligation to ensure the superintendent is meeting the goals the board had established and is operating the district in compliance with written board policy.

In addition, the board as employer has certain obligations to its most important employee. In some respects, the board fulfills the human resources function for the superintendent. Board members need to be aware of the legal aspects of the employment relationship — many of which may be spelled out in the superintendent’s contract. The board is responsible for the fair treatment of the superintendent and must comply

with all federal and state laws regarding employment. Board members also must understand that in their role as supervisor, they cannot not individually or collectively abuse their authority in any way. Every board member is responsible to the governing team and needs to exhibit trustworthy behavior or the entire board/superintendent relationship and the district will suffer.

Boards are charged with the responsibility to evaluate superintendent performance. So what is superintendent performance? Performance implies results or impact, which means that focus on performance starts at the top. The board, as trustee for its community, has the responsibility to keep the district focused on achieving the goals it has articulated for its schools, to confirm the administration is in compliance with written board policy, and to assure the community its schools are well-run. The board must have consensus. The top administrator cannot effectively work when given multiple directives. Speaking with one voice is an absolute necessity in order for the superintendent evaluation process to succeed.

Sample Policy — Superintendent

Duties and Authority

The Superintendent is the District's executive officer and is responsible for the administration and management of the District schools in accordance with School Board policies and directives, and State and federal law. District management duties include, without limitation, preparing, submitting, publishing, and posting reports and notifications as required by State and federal law. The Superintendent is authorized to develop administrative procedures and take other action as needed to implement Board policy and otherwise fulfill his or her responsibilities.

The Superintendent may delegate to other District staff members the exercise of any powers and the discharge of any duties imposed upon the Superintendent by Board policies or by Board vote. The delegation of power or duty, however, shall not relieve the Superintendent of responsibility for the action that was delegated.

Qualifications

The Superintendent must be of good character and of unquestionable morals and integrity. The Superintendent shall have the experience and the skills necessary to work effectively with the Board, District employees, students, and the community. The Superintendent must have and maintain Professional Educator License with a superintendent endorsement issued by the Illi-

nois State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board.

Evaluation

The Board will evaluate, at least annually, the Superintendent's performance and effectiveness, using standards and objectives developed by the Superintendent and Board that are consistent with the Board's policies and the Superintendent's contract. A specific time should be designated for a formal evaluation session with all Board members present. The evaluation should include a discussion of professional strengths as well as performance areas needing improvement.

The Superintendent shall annually present evidence of professional growth through attendance at educational conferences, in-service training, or similar continuing education pursuits.

Compensation and Benefits

The Board and the Superintendent shall enter into an employment agreement that conforms to Board policy and State law. This contract shall govern the employment relationship between the Board and the Superintendent. The terms of the Superintendent's employment agreement, when in conflict with this policy, will control.

From PRESS sample policy 3:40 (October 2017), Illinois Association of School Boards

What does IASB say about speaking with “one voice” to the superintendent?

Speaking with one voice means the board needs to direct its superintendent with one voice that represents the consensus of the board. The superintendent cannot work effectively under seven different bosses. The board must agree that the superintendent is obligated to follow only one set of directives from the board.

Clarity is of equal importance to consensus. Only a school board that effectively articulates its expectations can engage in meaningful evaluation of the superintendent’s performance. A board that gives the superintendent a largely free hand with no clear guidance is one that does not set expectations. Without expectations, there is no way to gauge performance.

For these objectives to be achieved, the board needs to create a climate where continuous improvement is possible. In order to achieve continuous improvement, however, the board needs to nurture a climate where risk-taking is encouraged. The superintendent should feel comfortable admitting when something is not working and make mid-course corrections. Therefore, an effective superintendent evaluation process should be designed to allow for such corrections.

For the superintendent:

Understanding the board’s role in clarifying district purpose, prioritizing goals, and establishing desired outcomes is key. The board has a responsibility to clarify intended student outcomes and monitor organizational effectiveness. While good school leaders are wired to lead, they should know that the role of the board is to determine mission, vision, and goals; and monitor progress. Effective superintendents understand the alignment needed between monitoring the progress of the school system and evaluating the work of the top administrator. Supporting and encouraging the work of the board throughout the evaluation process is not self-serving; rather, it is important in modeling accountability for the entire district.

For the board and the superintendent:

Both parties should understand and appreciate that superintendent evaluation is an opportunity to grow the relationship and continually improve. It is typical for superintendent evaluation to be followed by discussions related to contract renewal and salary issues, but that should not be the main focus. The evaluation process ought to bring about a discussion of what is going well, what needs to improve, and how to focus on the future.

When a board and superintendent view the evaluation process as an opportunity for professional growth for the superintendent and as an opportunity to facilitate growth of the superintendent/board relationship, much of the apprehension on both sides is diminished and the superintendent evaluation process becomes a natural extension of the district planning process.



AGREE ON EXPECTATIONS

Setting Expectations

Written Documents Provide the Foundation

The basis of a high quality board/superintendent relationship and a productive superintendent evaluation is a set of documents designed to formalize the relationship, detail the responsibilities of the superintendent, and express the expectations of the board. The agreements contained within these documents are yet another expression of the board speaking with one voice. Documents that contain these agreements include the following:

- **A copy of the superintendent’s employment contract.** An employment contract covering multiple years must, by Illinois law, include specific performance-based components. (See [Appendix B, Superintendent Employment and the Law](#)). The academic improvement goals contained in the contract can be among those addressed in the evaluation process. Conversely, academic improvement goals developed for the evaluation process may be used in writing a new multi-year contract. The contract may also contain other requirements for evaluating the superintendent that need to be followed. Boards should always consult their school attorney regarding contractual issues.
- **A job description** describes or contains the superintendent’s leadership and management responsibilities. Some job descriptions merely enumerate the chief executive’s responsibilities for each area of district operations, while others may contain standards for each area of responsibility. Regardless of how specific it is, the job description should be a tool to aid board members as they think about their expectations for the superintendent.
- **A copy of the district’s mission and vision statements and the goals** intended to drive the superintendent’s work. Goals for the superintendent typically are extensions of district goals and should be carefully aligned with them. Goals should be primarily forward-focused. Goal setting is discussed in more detail in a later section.
- **School board policies** express the board’s expectations for the district, delegate authority to the superintendent, describe the limitations placed on executive authority, and regulate the board/superintendent relationship. Compliance with board policies is a legitimate focal point

in superintendent appraisal. As part of the ongoing evaluation process, the board may ask the superintendent to provide evidence of compliance with written board policies.

- **School district plans** may have been developed by the board, with involvement of the community and/or staff in order to give the district some direction. These are often referred to as strategic plans. The board and superintendent will need to ask if the plans are still relevant. Do they contain goals for the superintendent?
- **Professional standards** have been developed for the superintendency at both the national and state levels. The board may wish to incorporate either the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (previously the ISLLC Standards) or the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Professional Standards for Superintendents as part of the evaluation process. Alternatively, it may want to create its own set of expectations, influenced by district priorities, available staff resources, and other location considerations. (**Appendix A** offers a sample of the types of professional standards a board might wish to consider.)

A Suggested Framework

The roles and responsibilities of the superintendent are many and varied. He or she is ultimately responsible for everything that goes on in the district — from student learning to well-maintained buildings and grounds. These roles and responsibilities require a variety of skills, characteristics, expertise, knowledge, and activities. Therefore, in determining the expectations on which the superintendent's performance will be measured, it is useful to devise categories within which expectations and specific targets can be set.

The four categories below may provide a useful framework: (Eadie, 2005)

1. Board/superintendent relations
2. Implementation of the district's strategic initiatives (mission/vision/goals)
3. District leadership and management
4. Community (external) relations

Category No. 1: Board/superintendent relations. One of the major responsibilities of the superintendent is to support the board in doing its work. This may include assisting the board in building its own capacity as a governing board — through providing professional development opportunities, keeping the board abreast of developments at the local, state, or national level that may impact its work, and most significantly, ensuring the board has the best information possible to make informed decisions.

Category No. 2: Implementation of the district's strategic initiatives. The board sets the district's direction and articulates that direction in its mission, vision, and goals statements (ends). These ends statements then become the cornerstone of the board's written policy manual. A few policies will be pure "ends" policies, but "ends" language may appear throughout the policy manual in policies that serve primarily another purpose, such as delegating authority or setting executive limitations. The board then monitors progress towards these ends and compliance with written board policy, using data as the means for its assessment. The board that has received monitoring reports from the super-

intendent throughout the year will find most of this piece of the evaluation complete. District performance equates to superintendent performance. District goal setting is addressed in more detail in a later section.

Category No. 3: District leadership and management. In addition to implementing the board’s strategic goals and objectives, the superintendent is charged with operating the district efficiently and effectively. Managing operations is relatively easy to assess because efficiency and cost-effectiveness can be measured. For example, a budget recommendation is either balanced or it’s not. A building project comes in on time or on budget, or it does not. While leadership is perhaps a subjective quality and more difficult to assess, it is at the heart of an individual’s ability to bring a group of people together around a common objective.

A well-designed evaluation instrument also provides the board an opportunity to assess leadership and management skills. Beyond simply achieving outcomes, the superintendent can and should be expected to conduct his/her duties in a moral and ethical manner. In addition, the board may also choose to evaluate the superintendent’s skills by his method and manner, style and tone used with staff, students, board, and the public. The superintendent can be held accountable for creating a positive school climate and culture only when the school board is clear about these expectations.

Category No. 4: Community (external) relations. The board should expect its superintendent to represent the district within the community, to carry the district’s message, and advocate on its behalf. What this interaction looks like will differ from community to community, but could include media relations, participation in local civic groups, or forming partnerships with other governmental bodies such as the city council or park district.

The expectations that fall within each of these categories may already be articulated in the documents discussed above. For example, most policy manuals will contain several policies regarding board/superintendent relations and community relations.¹ A well-crafted job description will contain expectations about the superintendent’s leadership and management responsibilities. A district’s mission, vision, and goals may be contained within a district’s strategic plan and/or policy manual.

¹ PRESS sample policy 2:130, 3:10 (July 2016), 6:10 (July 2013), Illinois Association of School Boards

Sample Policy — School District Philosophy

The School District, in an active partnership with parents and community, will promote excellence in a caring environment in which all students learn and grow. This partnership shall empower all students to develop a strong self-esteem and to become responsible learners and decision-makers. The School District is committed to developing

and using a visionary and innovative curriculum, a knowledgeable and dedicated staff, and sound fiscal and management practices.

From PRESS sample policy 1:30 (July 2016), Illinois Association of School Boards



Development of Written District Goals

An effective superintendent evaluation process begins with a clear set of written expectations for the district, articulated as written district goals. If the school board does not have district goals that are up-to-date and relevant, it would be a good idea to engage in a goal-setting process. Goal setting in its simplest form involves three big questions:

Question No. 1: Where are we now?

Here the board assesses current needs and problems and anticipates future challenges.

Question No. 2: Where do we want to go?

Here the board determines what it wants its schools to do for students and/or what it wants in place in the district in one to five years.

Question No. 3: How shall we get there?

Here the board adopts its goals and the superintendent and staff create plans for reaching these goals.

Although goal setting is beyond the scope of this guide, a board should expect to devote time and effort to the process and to involve a wide range of district stakeholders. Goals for the district need to be aligned with the community’s aspirations for the schools and be reasonably appropriate for the district’s resources.

Setting District Goals and Direction

IASB field services directors are available to assist the board in the goal-setting process.

When a board has engaged in a thoughtful goal-setting process for the district, whether they are broad, comprehensive long-term goals or specific annual goals, then the question can be asked, “What can we as a board expect of the superintendent over the next 12 months to help the district fulfill these goals?” Where a district has only broad goals, superintendent goals and targets will need to be developed that are appropriate for the evaluation instrument.

For example, a board may have a long-term goal “to provide facilities that create an environment that enhances learning.” An appropriate goal statement for a superintendent might be to “present a facilities plan that supports the technology and other needs of the district’s high school curriculum.”



AGREE ON INDICATORS

Agreement on Key Performance Indicators

As previously addressed, there are a number of documents which may contain potential expectations of the superintendent. However, for the process to be fair, the superintendent and board must discuss and reach agreement on what the board will reasonably expect of the superintendent in terms of results. Nothing will erode the board/superintendent relationship more quickly than the board evaluating on something the superintendent had no idea he or she was being held accountable for.

Further, the board and superintendent also need to agree on what measurements will be used to determine whether a particular goal has been met, or whether the administration is in compliance with board policy. For goals, the board needs to ask, “What will success look like?” For policies, the board needs to ask “What assurances do we have that the policy is being implemented?” A measure may be quantitative (e.g. did we decrease truancy by 2 percent?) or qualitative (e.g. is our facilities plan effective?)

The performance review of each goal and expectation should be based on enough data and informed opinion to avoid personal biases and gut feelings. Because the evaluation will provide the foundation for planning the next year’s goals, conclusions need to be based on the most informed judgments possible. As part of the goal-setting process, the board and superintendent will need to agree on what data the board will need in order to monitor performance. Data collection efforts could include surveys, data from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC), periodic performance updates, etc.

In addition, the superintendent should feel free to ask the school board: “What evidence will you require of me to demonstrate that I have achieved my goals or fulfilled your expectations?”

The school board should also keep in mind that information comes with a price tag. Even when information is available from internal sources, the process of gathering and compiling it into a comprehensible form takes staff

School Board Accountability: Monitoring District Performance

IASB offers an in-district workshop to assist boards in learning and developing an effective process for monitoring district performance. Working with their own district goals and policy manuals, boards have an opportunity to identify monitoring criteria, identify indicators of district progress towards these goals and compliance with board policy, and to develop a district monitoring calendar.

For more information, boards should contact their IASB field services director.

time and energy. When each board member wants to see something different, generating all of the information can be cost prohibitive. Therefore, members of the board need to reach agreement on a precise description of the information that the superintendent will be asked to provide. That agreement should take into account the amount of staff time that can be devoted to the task. This is a critical area in which the board must again speak with one voice.

Note: When a board has not engaged in a district planning and goal-setting process, it may be necessary for the board and superintendent to agree on an interim evaluation mechanism until such planning is undertaken. This is a situation a superintendent new to a district often faces. An interim evaluation instrument could be based on the requirements contained in the superintendent's contract, job description, and state or national professional standards. After district goals have been established and superintendent goals that align with the district goals have been created, the focus of the evaluation can move towards measurement of how the superintendent performed via these goals. As an initial step, the board and superintendent might agree on a small number of goals for the superintendent that express the board's most immediate priorities to serve as a focus for district improvement and for the superintendent's evaluation.



AGREE ON AN INSTRUMENT

Put It in Writing and Develop an Instrument

The school board hasn't spoken until it puts its expectations in writing and into an evaluation instrument. While it is tempting to want to start the process by borrowing an instrument from another district or other source, a board that views the superintendent evaluation as part of the overall district planning process recognizes the need to develop an instrument based on its own unique priorities, expectations, and needs.

Using a template from another source or from the collection of samples available from an IASB field services director is certainly acceptable; however, we caution board members against using the content contained within the instrument. As previously stated, the expectations and goals for superintendent performance are unique to each community and are a foundation to an evaluation process.

Crafting the language to express expectations and goals should be a collaborative process, owned by the full board and superintendent. In addition, an evaluation instrument should never be "set in stone," but may need to be modified as the board/superintendent relationship develops, or as situations or circumstances may warrant.

What to include:

An evaluation instrument will normally include one or all of the following components:

- progress towards district goals
- performance against professional standards
- performance on other expectations

Progress towards district goals. As discussed earlier, the board generally adopts broad, comprehensive long-term goals or specific annual goals. For the evaluation instrument, superintendent goals and targets will need to be developed for the 12-month period under review.

Before board members complete their individual rating forms, the superintendent must provide a report demonstrating evidence of completion or progress towards the goal. The form may include room for the superintendent's report or the report may be provided as a separate document.

Performance against professional standards. The board may wish to measure the superintendent’s performance against the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (previously the ISLLC Standards) for superintendents or the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Professional Standards for Superintendents. These are both comprehensive documents: the board may wish to include those items judged most significant and relevant.

Performance on other expectations. There may be expectations contained in the superintendent’s job description or contract, or otherwise agreed upon, which are not reflected in district goals. These would need to be incorporated into the instrument as well.

Rating process

Evaluation instruments generally include numeric rating scales, narratives, or a combination of both.

A numeric rating scale is more valuable if it includes descriptors, e.g. “Exceeds expectations,” “Meets expectations,” or, “Below expectations.” Many practitioners prefer a system with multiple gradations of performance such as the 9-point Likert-type rating scale, as it reduces the effect of one rating that may not be consistent with the majority cast. Whenever a numeric scale is used, it is valuable to add a “Comment” section, so that the evaluator may add an explanation of the rating given. Numeric rating scales are commonly used when evaluating performance against professional standards.

A narrative format may be particularly appropriate when the evaluator is assessing progress towards district goals. Although the superintendent will provide data to demonstrate progress or completion of a particular goal, individual board members may want to add their own observations.

Summative report

It may be helpful to develop a summation sheet to assist the board president or evaluation committee chair who collates the individual board member results. Ultimately, the final report that the superintendent receives needs to reflect the consensus of the board.

Signature section

It is common to have a section at the end of the instrument where the board president and superintendent provide their signatures and date that the evaluation was reviewed with the superintendent. This is the copy that will be placed in the superintendent’s personnel file.



ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The Annual Performance Review

In the annual performance review, the school board compares the superintendent's results with the board's expectations. One year prior, the board and superintendent will have already reached a clear agreement on and documented

- the board's expectations of the superintendent;
- the factors that the board will evaluate in measuring the superintendent's performance against those expectations; and
- the information that the board will want to see in evaluating the superintendent's performance.

If the board has diligently come to consensus and spoken with clarity regarding its expectations and has been monitoring progress towards district goals, the annual performance review will in all likelihood go smoothly. The board and superintendent have a clear idea of what will be evaluated and the performance information has been shared and examined. The performance review should produce real growth for the district's leadership. Keep in mind, however, that the performance review is no time to make changes in expectations or to ask for different kinds of measurements. The superintendent should be informed far in advance how the board plans to gather and use evaluative information. Unless the superintendent has misinterpreted the board's original request for information, the board needs to live with what it said it wanted in terms of results and information for measuring those results.

A Note on Public Meetings

The Illinois Open Meetings Act permits the school board to hold closed meetings to consider the performance of specific employees. There is no exception to public meetings that is generally applicable to goal setting or planning.

The work of planning a process for evaluating the superintendent's performance, therefore, needs


to be carried out in public meetings. On the other hand, any discussion involving the superintendent's actual performance or the board's evaluation of the superintendent can and should be conducted in a closed meeting.

This is not a legal opinion; for legal advice, each school board should contact its own attorney.

When the time comes to assess the superintendent's performance against the expectations agreed to with the board, who takes the initiative? While there are many approaches that can be taken, the following could be considered best practice:

- The superintendent presents to the school board his or her own self-assessment of performance on each of the goals and expectations that have been agreed to. The superintendent should provide evidence of some tangible progress toward the agreed-upon expectations.
- Individual board members complete the evaluation forms. The forms are collected by the board president, or perhaps an evaluation committee chair, who compiles the ratings and/or feedback.
- The board then meets to discuss and come to a consensus regarding superintendent performance. The ratings are compiled into a single document.
- The board president or evaluations chairman meets with the superintendent to present the final evaluation to the superintendent.
- The entire board meets with the superintendent, so that he or she has the opportunity to hear from all board members. If board members disagree about superintendent performance, it is important that superintendent hear all points of view. However, the board president will want to remind everyone that the one voice whose direction the superintendent will be expected to follow is that of the majority.
- A written summary of the evaluation should be given to the superintendent with a copy retained by the board in a confidential superintendent's personnel file.
- If the evaluation instrument or process needs to be modified to reflect additional or modified expectations as well as updated goals, this is the time to do so.

Decisions regarding the superintendent's compensation and benefits and contract renewal issues may be considered at this time.



CONDUCT THE MID-YEAR CHECK-UP

Conduct the Mid-Year Check-Up

While this guide describes an annual formal evaluation process, boards are encouraged to engage in a less formal, semi-annual evaluation. Typically, the superintendent presents an update on his or her own progress to date on each of the goals and expectations that have been agreed to. This is an opportunity for both the board and superintendent to determine if any adjustments to the yearly plan are required, due to unforeseen circumstances or a shift in district priorities. It is also an opportunity for the board to express to the superintendent any concerns about his or her performance to date, so the superintendent can react and make corrections where appropriate prior to the formal annual review.

A decorative graphic at the top of the page features a series of hexagons. The first hexagon on the left is solid maroon and contains the text 'FOCUS ON THE FUTURE'. The subsequent hexagons are white with a light gray outline, and they are connected by a series of horizontal and diagonal lines that create a path-like structure.

FOCUS ON
THE FUTURE

Focus on the Future

Once the annual formal review is complete, the cycle begins anew. The board and superintendent will want to review district goals and objectives and any guiding statements regarding district mission and philosophy. If revision of any of these “ends” documents seems appropriate, the board may want to establish steps to involve stakeholders in the process.

The superintendent will then develop superintendent goals for the coming year. The board and superintendent will agree on the goals and measures of progress. These may be written into the superintendent’s performance contract, if appropriate.



Bringing it All Together – Final Thoughts

As trustee for the community, the board has an obligation to evaluate the individual to whom it has entrusted its most important assets — its children and its money. In addition, as employer, the board has an obligation to let its chief executive officer know what is expected of him or her, to give feedback regarding performance, and to offer opportunities for continuous improvement.

The process begins with a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, and relationships. The employment of the superintendent is based on concepts outlined in the contract, job description, district goals, and board policy. The board and superintendent reach consensus regarding expectations and measures and document them in an evaluation instrument. Time is scheduled for this work on the board's annual agenda calendar, taking into account dates by which certain decisions have to be made, most notably decisions regarding the superintendent's compensation and contract status. Ideally, at least one opportunity for a more informal superintendent evaluation is scheduled to allow for mid-year corrections and a discussion regarding progress towards goals. An annual summative evaluation takes place in executive session. After the formal evaluation process is complete, the board may want to review the superintendent's job description and employment contract to determine whether they are current and relevant. If appropriate, the board may act on the superintendent's compensation or contract. At this point, the board and superintendent focus on the future, establishing goals, expectations, and measures for the following year.

A board and superintendent that have taken the time to develop a mutually-agreed-upon process for evaluation will have taken great strides towards strengthening the district's leadership team and moving the district forward to even higher levels of achievement and success.

Appendix A

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 (Previously the ISLLC Standards)

The following is a summary of the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, formerly known as the ISLLC Standards. The National Policy Board for Education Administration approved the refreshed standards on October 22, 2015.

STANDARD 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of 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.

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: Council of Chief State School Officers (2015)

<https://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/professional-standards-educational-leaders-2015-summary>

Appendix B

Superintendent Employment and the Law Best Practices in Developing and Maintaining Good Relations with the Superintendent

The legal backdrop and best practices that shape the board/superintendent relationship are explained below in a Q&A format. This document is designed to provide general information and is not intended to serve as legal advice nor a full comprehensive list of items related to the board's role as an employer. Boards should consult their attorney before taking any action concerning a superintendent's employment.

1. What process should a board use to employ a new superintendent?

During or before a search for a superintendent, the board should meet with its attorney. Together they should identify terms for the superintendent's contract. This should include identifying performance components for a contract that align with the board's goals for the district and that the board may use as the basis for evaluating the superintendent. After this discussion, the attorney will draft a contract to present to the applicant(s) whom the boards select(s) as its finalist(s) (Braun, 2016). (Legal Reference: 105/ILCS 5/10-23.8).

2. Must a district employ a superintendent?

Yes. All except very small school districts are required to employ a full-time superintendent. A superintendent may serve in two professional capacities, provided that full-time equivalency results in a maximum of one full-time position. (Legal References: 105/ILCS 5/10-23.8, 23 Ill. Admin. Code 1.310(c)).

3. What are the duties of the superintendent and where are the superintendent's duties and responsibilities found?

The superintendent is the chief administrator of the school district and is responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of the district. Superintendents are required to make recommendations to the board concerning the budget; building plans; the locations of sites; the selection, retention, and dismissal of personnel; and the selection of textbooks, instructional material and courses of study (Braun, 2016). (Legal Reference: 105 ILCS 5/10-21.4).

Superintendent duties can be found in four primary places: the Illinois School Code, Illinois State Board of Education rules, board policies, and the superintendent's employment contract. The board has considerable authority to shape these duties and responsibilities through its policy-making function and the superintendent's contract.

4. Must the board enter into a contract with the superintendent?

Yes. A district must employ a superintendent under either a contract for a period not exceeding one year or a performance-based contract for a period not exceeding five years (Braun, 2016). (Legal Reference: 105/ILCS 5/10-23.8).

5. Why would a board offer a superintendent a single-year contract?

Boards have used a contract for one year or less to fill an interim superintendent's position. Other reasons may exist depending on circumstances. (Legal Reference: 105/ILCS 5/10-23.8).

6. What are the requirements for a multi-year, performance-based contract?

A multi-year, performance-based contract must be linked to student performance and academic

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improvement within the schools of the district. Performance-based contracts must include goals and indicators of student performance and academic improvement determined and used by the local school board to measure the performance and effectiveness of the superintendent. They may also include other information as the local school board determines. (Legal Reference: 105/ILCS 5/10-23.8).

7. How does a board extend a multi-year, performance-based contract?

The board must make a finding that the superintendent met all the contract's performance and improvement goals before it may extend or roll-over the contract. (Legal Reference: 105/ILCS 5/10-23.8).

8. Who supervises and evaluates the superintendent?

The school board! The Illinois School Code requires the school board "to direct, through policy, its superintendent in his or her charge of the administration of the school district." The statute also requires the school board to evaluate the superintendent in his or her "administration of school board policies and his or her stewardship of the assets of the district." (Legal References: 105 ILCS 5/10-20, 5/10-23, and 5/10-23.8).

9. Can a board dismiss a superintendent during his or her contract?

To dismiss an individual during the term of a contract, the school board must have sufficient cause (e.g., prove substantial breach of contract) and provide thorough substantive and procedural due process. Depending on the circumstances, the protections of teacher tenure laws may apply and/or a pre-termination hearing may be required. (Braun, 2016). (Legal Reference: 105 ILCS 5/24-12).

10. How does a board non-renew a superintendent at the end of his/her contract?

If a superintendent is working under a multi-year contract, notice of non-renewal must be given in accordance with the date specified in the contract and/or by April 1 of the year in which the contract expires, whichever is earlier. If notice is not given, the contract automatically extends for one more year. Notice must be served in writing and state the specific reason for the non-renewal. (Legal References: 105 ILCS 5/10-21.4, 21.4a, 23.8, 23.8b, 24-11, 24-12, and 24A-15).

For superintendents with tenure who are not serving under a multi-year contract, the school board must abide by the contractual agreements set forth in the contract and comply with the Illinois School Code's notice and seniority provisions. (Legal References: 105 ILCS 5/10-21.4, 21.4a, 23.8, 23.8b, 24-11, 24-12, and 24A-15).

11. In regard to best practices, what is the first step in ensuring healthy board/superintendent relationships?

Enhancing the board/superintendent relationship is an ongoing process between the board and its superintendent. The first step in ensuring a healthy board and superintendent relationship begins during the selection of the superintendent. The board must first be proactive and make sure that that the superintendent it employs is a good match for the district. If the superintendent is not a good match for the district, trust may be jeopardized as the board may gradually feel uncertain as to whether or not the superintendent can meet the board's expectations.

Fusarelli and Jackson (2004) noted, "One reason superintendent turnover is high in some districts is that school boards seldom know what or who they are looking for, other than a replacement superintendent. The all-too-common result? The wrong person for the wrong job."

Boards must pay close attention to their search process when hiring a superintendent, and should

consider utilizing a professional search company to assist with the application and interview process. During this stage of the hiring process, the board will garner first impressions of the new superintendent, the working relationship between the two, and whether or not the candidate can meet the expectations of the board. (Fusarelli and Jackson, 2004).

12. **What is the appropriate relationship the board should have with its superintendent?**

To ensure good governance, it is essential that a good relationship exist between the board and the superintendent. The foundation of this relationship is trust, communication, and knowing appropriate roles and duties. Because the board is the superintendent's employer, it is the board's primary responsibility to create and maintain this ambience although the superintendent certainly has a role to play.

It should be noted that although the board is the superintendent's employer, the board/superintendent relationship is quite different than the board's role with other employees of the district. Whereas the board officially hires all employees of the district, the board is not expected to play a supervisory role nor be engaged in general staff evaluations as with the superintendent. In actuality, the board employs and evaluates one person — the superintendent — and holds that person accountable for district performance and compliance with written board policy.

The board/superintendent relationship is unique because the superintendent is a de facto member of the governance team and often assists the board members with their professional development needs. Boards that regularly engages in professional development often minimizes various issues, including role confusion. Role confusion can hamper relationships between the board and superintendent and often lead to superintendent and/or board member turnover.

McAdams (2003) stated, "Effective superintendents know that in addition to everything else they do, they must lead the board and take responsibility for its training. It is a paradox. The superintendent works for the board, yet the superintendent must accept responsibility for educating the board and showing the board how to lead."

To enhance board/superintendent relationships, school boards and board members, both collectively and individually, should occasionally spend time with the superintendent away from board meetings. This could include attending school athletic or other extracurricular events, attending educational conferences, and enjoying back-to-school picnics and holiday socials together. (Rice, 2013). Although board members spend professional as well as some personal time together on occasion, it is vitally important that board members keep in mind the possibility of a dual role as employer/boss and as friend. It should be noted that the issue of "buddy to boss" is not straightforward, because in the real world of work, emotions and relationships can be tricky but must never be confused with that of a legitimate "friendship."

As noted by McCarthy (2011), "No matter how close a manager may feel to an employee, it should never be confused with a real 'friendship'. You might be a friendly boss, and maybe even share some of the characteristics of a true friendship. You might even call it 'a friend with boundaries.' However, the role of a manger transcends friendship and creates a boundary and potential scenarios that would never exist between true friends."

If the board gets too emotionally attached with the superintendent, it may adversely impact major decision-making of the board. For instance, part of the board's role as supervisor is to judge the performance of the superintendent, which includes offering constructive feedback. If

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the board views the superintendent too much as a friend, some board members may be reluctant to be objective if they feel that doing so will impede the friendship with the superintendent. Equally as important, friends do not have to act 100 percent professionally towards each other. If the relationship is viewed too much as a friendship, the board members may be tempted to lower their guards and treat the superintendent less professionally which may include a lack of respect and dignity as well. The board must never forget its role as an employer and must treat the superintendent as a professional, and with respect and dignity at all times.

13. What additional steps can the board take to ensure a healthy relationship exists between the board and superintendent, including the importance of treating the superintendent with dignity and respect as their employer?

- a. The board should make sure that there is an understanding of the roles and duties between the board and the superintendent. This will assist in eliminating role-confusion which leads to board and/or superintendent turnover.
- b. The board needs to make sure it has clarified the district's purpose. As its primary task, the board continually defines, articulates, and redefines district ends. Ends reflect the district's purpose, direction, priorities, and desired outcomes and are recorded in statements of core values/beliefs, mission, vision and goals. Strategic planning assists the board in creating district ends which become the superintendent's marching orders; it is vital for the superintendent to understand what the board expectations are so all can do their jobs with fidelity.
- c. The board should formulate board process agreements and expectations between the board and the superintendent. Agreements are a set of operating procedures by which the board and superintendent collectively agree to adhere to while governing the affairs of the district. Process agreements are a framework for interaction and are used to handle difficult situations. Operational norms will assist the board and superintendent interact in areas such as:
 - During meetings
 - Between meetings
 - On an as-needed basis
 - With individual members
 - With administrators and staff
 - Areas of responsibility
 - Communications
 - Regarding complaints

Legal References:

Illinois Compiled Statutes, SCHOOLS (105 ILCS 5/) School Code
105 ILCS 5/10-16.7 School board duties with respect to superintendent
5/10-20 Powers of school board
5/10-20.47 Administrator and teacher salary and benefits; report
5/10-21.4 Superintendent – duties
5/10-23 Additional powers of boards
5/10-23.8 Superintendent contracts
5/21B-20 Types of licenses
5/21B-25 Endorsement on licenses
5/24-11 Boards of Education – Boards of School Inspectors – Contractual continued service
5/24-12 Removal and dismissal of teachers in contractual continued service
5/24A-3 Evaluation training and pre-qualification

Illinois Administrative Code, Title 23

1.310 Administrative Qualifications and Responsibilities

1.705 Requirements for Supervisory and Administrative Staff

29.130 Superintendent

IASB's PRESS sample policy 3:40 Superintendent

Additional References:

Fusarelli, L.D., and Jackson, B.J. (2004, September). How Do We Find and Retain Superintendents? *The School Administrator*, 61(8), 56. Retrieved from www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=13960.

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McAdams, D. (2003). Training Your Board to Lead. *The School Administrator*. Retrieved from: www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=8968.

McCarthy, D. (2011). Great Leadership. Retrieved from: www.greatleadershipbydan.com/2011/03/im-your-boss-not-your-friend-10-reasons.html.

Rice, P. (2013). *Vanishing School Boards: Where School Boards Have Gone, Why We Need Them and How to Bring Them Back*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Appendix C

Sample Calendar for Superintendent Evaluation Activities

In establishing a schedule for evaluating the superintendent, the board should take into account the dates by which certain decisions need to be made, most notably decisions regarding the superintendent's contract and contractual status.

May/June

- Board and superintendent agree on district goals for the year.

June/July

- Superintendent creates superintendent goals which support district goals, including indicators of success. Board approves these superintendent goals. The board and superintendent agree on any additional expectations for which the superintendent will be held accountable.

August

- Through the budgeting process, resources are allocated to support district goals.

Fall

- The board evaluates its own processes and effectiveness through a board self-evaluation.*
- The board and superintendent conduct a less-formal semi-annual evaluation to monitor progress to date.

January/February

- Superintendent provides the board with a self-assessment of performance on each of the goals and expectations that had been agreed to.
- Individual board members complete evaluation forms. The forms are collected by the board president or evaluations committee chair, and results compiled.
- Board meets to discuss and come to consensus regarding superintendent performance.
- Board president (or committee) meets with superintendent to present the final evaluation.

February/March

- The entire board meets with superintendent so that he or she has the opportunity to hear all points of view.
- A written summary of the evaluation is given to the superintendent and a copy retained by the board in a confidential "superintendent's personnel file."

March/April

- Decisions regarding superintendent's compensation and benefits and contract renewal may be considered.
- If the evaluation form or process needs to be modified, this is the time to do so.

May/June

- The process repeats. The board and superintendent revisit district goals and modify as appropriate.

*A board self-evaluation can occur any time before the annual formal superintendent evaluation process.

Appendix D

Foundational Principles of Effective Governance

As the corporate entity charged by law with governing a school district, each school board sits in trust for its entire community. The obligation to govern effectively imposes some fundamental duties on the board:

1. **The board clarifies the district purpose.**

As its primary task, the board continually defines, articulates, and re-defines district ends to answer the recurring question — who gets what benefits for how much? Effective ends development requires attention to at least two key concerns: student learning and organizational effectiveness.

- Ends express the benefits the school district should deliver, thereby providing the entire system with clarity of purpose and a clear direction. A school board rarely creates district ends; rather, it most often detects them through listening and observing.
- Ends reflect the district's purpose, direction, priorities, and desired outcomes and are recorded in statements of core values/beliefs, mission, vision, and goals.
- In effective school districts, every part of the organization is aligned with the ends articulated by the school board in written board policy.
- Well-crafted ends enable the school board to effectively and efficiently monitor district performance and assess organizational success (Principle 5).

2. **The board connects with the community.**

The school board engages in an ongoing two-way conversation with the entire community. This conversation enables the board to hear and understand the community's educational aspirations and desires, to serve effectively as an advocate for district improvement, and to inform the community of the district's performance.

- Community engagement, also called public engagement or civic engagement, is the process by which school boards actively involve diverse citizens in dialogue, deliberation, and collaborative thinking around common interests for their public schools.
- Effective community engagement is essential to create trust and support among community, board, superintendent, and staff.
- A board in touch with community-wide concerns and values will serve the broad public good rather than being overly influenced by special interests.
- The school board must be aggressive in reaching out to the community — the district's owners — to engage people in conversations about education and the public good. In contrast, people who bring customer concerns to board members should be appropriately directed to the superintendent and staff.

3. **The board employs a superintendent.**

The board employs and evaluates one person — the superintendent — and holds that person accountable for district performance and compliance with written board policy.

- An effective school board develops and maintains a productive relationship with the superintendent.
- The employment relationship consists of mutual respect and a clear understanding of respective roles, responsibilities, and expectations. This relationship should be grounded in a thoughtfully crafted employment contract and job description; procedures for communications and ongoing assessment; and reliance on written policy.
- Although the board is legally required to approve all employment contracts, the board delegates authority to the superintendent to select and evaluate all district staff within the standards established in written board policy.

4. **The board delegates authority.**

The board delegates authority to the superintendent to manage the district and provide leadership for the staff. Such authority is communicated through written board policies that designate district ends and define operating parameters.

- Ultimately, the school board is responsible for everything, yet must recognize that everything depends upon a capable and competent staff.
- “Delegates authority to” means empowering the superintendent and staff to pursue board ends single-mindedly and without hesitation. A board that does (or re-does) staff work disempowers the staff. High levels of superintendent and staff accountability require high levels of delegation.
- Delegation is difficult for anyone accustomed to direct action. However, to appropriately stay focused on the big picture and avoid confusing the staff, members of the school board must discipline themselves to trust their superintendent and staff and not involve themselves in day-to-day operations.

5. **The board monitors performance.**

The board constantly monitors progress toward district ends and compliance with written board policies using data as the basis for assessment.

- A school board that pursues its ends through the delegation of authority has a moral obligation to itself and the community to determine whether that authority is being used as intended.
- Unless the board is clear about what it wants, there is no valid way to measure progress and compliance.
- A distinction should be made between monitoring data (used by the board for accountability) and management data (used by the staff for operations).
- The constructive use of data is a skill that must be learned. The board should have some understanding of data, but will typically require guidance from the staff.

6. **The board takes responsibility for itself.**

The board, collectively and individually, takes full responsibility for board activity and behavior — the work it chooses to do and how it chooses to do the work. Individual board members are obligated to express their opinions and respect others’ opinions; however, board members understand the importance of abiding by the majority decisions of the board.

- The school board’s role as trustee for the community is unique and essential to both the district and community.
- While the board must operate within legal parameters, good governance requires the board be responsible for itself, its processes and contributions. Board deliberations and actions are limited to board work, not staff work.
- The board seeks continuity of leadership, even as it experiences turnover in membership. The board accomplishes this by using written board policies to guide board operations, by providing thorough orientation and training for all members, and by nurturing a positive and inviting board culture.

Appendix E

References

- National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015*. Reston, VA: Author
- Eadie, Doug. Prescription for success. *American School Board Journal*, August 2008, 46-47.
- Nemir, William. (1998). "Evaluation as a tool: How to develop a goals-based superintendent evaluation system. *Texas Lone Star*, September 1998, 34-38.

Additional Resources

- The Key Work of School Boards Guidebook*, National School Boards Association, 3rd edition, 2015
- Professional Standards for the Superintendency*, American Association of School Administrators, 1993, 16 pages.
- Coming to Order: A Guide to Successful School Board Meetings*, Illinois Association of School Boards, 2nd edition, 2017
- Indiana Superintendent Evaluation Process*, A Joint Project by the Indiana School Boards Association and the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents, 2012 revision, 42 pages.