

MEMORANDUM

FM

TO: TOM FREEDMAN
FROM: RAVEN MONTGOMERY
RE: SUMMARY OF THE AMERICAN SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT
DATE: JUNE 3, 1997

Part One: The Superintendency in Question

Chapter One: Changing Conditions and Rising Expectations

-the future of the superintendency depends on whether policy makers and the public gain a clear understanding of the conditions that are driving the most qualified individuals from the superintendency and other educational positions

The Education Pressure Cooker

-superintendents are always alienating with their decisions, and over time there is very little gratitude for this job
-supportive organizational attributes all tend to break down as each faction begins to push its education agenda at the expense of the others

Where Heat Comes From

-pressures come as much from employees of the school systems as it does from the parents whose children attend the schools
-this is exacerbated by communities overwhelmed in dealing with existing problems

The Condition of American Youth

The Resulting Evolution in Roles and Responsibilities

-superintendents must be in a position to distribute power and influence in such a way that it supports the capacity to continuously improve schools
-must develop shared visions that address the needs of students and communities while holding firm to high standards established by government, business, and their profession

What is Expected of the Superintendent

-the demands on the superintendent are to meet the needs of the changing population of students who are affected as never before by the realities of shifting demographics, advancing technology, and the demands of an uncertain future

Chapter Two: The Superintendent's Changing Role

Evolution of the Superintendency

-Historic overview

Shifting Roles

-Four major roles-

-Clerical:

-assisting the school board with the day-to-day details of school activities

-Master educator:

-providing direction on curricular and instructional matters

-Expert manager:

-strong push for hierarchical bureaucracy and scientific management

-Chief executive officer for the board:

-current view, serving as the professional advisor to the board, leader of reforms, manager of resources, and communicator to the public

1980's

The Role of the US Office of Education

The 1990's

-the push was to achieve greater understanding through exchange of information and ideas among both internal and external groups; the goal was to ensure that all the groups that were needed to support public education were full partners in the process

-this era has seen a significant increase in the number and variety of groups that have focused attention on educational issues, even though their primary interests is elsewhere

-schools have become the focal point for the resolution of broad economics, ideological, and societal issues

-these groups are better organized and financed than at any period of the past

Balancing Countervailing Forces

-the superintendent are being called on to decentralize and democratize public education, to involve school administrators, teachers, and parents in determining what will work best for their schools

-the superintendent is being asked to support and facilitate school-based decisions, shared leadership, and other site-based approaches to school leadership

-feels that teachers must constantly change curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of children and communities they serve

-the challenge for the superintendent in the '90's is to find ways to manage all the various national, state, and local pressures for improving school performance while working with local school board and staff members to develop the most effective schools possible

Responsiveness to the Needs of the Twenty-First Century

-the key to successful superintendency in the next millennium will be responsiveness to the diverse demands placed on education

-superintendents must establish trust, focus interest and attention on student learning, and create a positive community paradigm if they are to have any hope of maintaining control of American education

-a major responsibility of superintendents is to deal with conflicting expectations, multiple

political agendas, and varying ideas without unduly creating enemies or distrust

Part Two: Challenges and Dilemmas

Chapter Three: Negotiating Community Politics and Controversy

Types of Political Issues

Superintendents Prepared

- attempted to help aspiring urban superintendents to solve conflicts between different segments of the community or among special-interests groups; to communicate effectively
- with the news media and the general public; to work collaboratively with staff members and motivate people to meet common goals; to manage the business and financial sides of complex organizations, and to coordinate efforts with municipal leaders and human-service providers

The Inevitability of Political Decision Making

- the decision arena of the superintendent becomes smaller and smaller as public officials become embroiled in political debate related to schools
- policy makers broaden their involvement in decisions and policy statements regarding, which narrows those left to educators

Political Acumen

- the challenge for today's school administrators is to find ways to deal with the politics and obtain needed support while ensuring important student outcomes
- the political goal is to help the community power structure work through disputes with least amount of permanent damage

Special-Interest and Pressure Groups

- cause problems for the superintendents because their tactics interfere with allowing the school to run effectively when everyone wants to call the shots

Educational Reform and the Religious Community

Policy, Practice, and Pressure Groups

- an effective approach to dealing with interest and pressure groups includes strong curriculum review and selection policies that allow an appropriate response to legitimate concerns, along with broad community involvement in curriculum development
- strong policies for the selection of curriculum materials and instructional strategies should be well defined and accessible to the community
- policies should allow the board and superintendent to keep control of potentially volatile situations

Reflections on the Politicized Superintendency

- superintendents should not form protective peer alliances, embrace the political power that can mobilize resources to achieve results
- they need powerful constituents to stick with them and provide support

Chapter 4: Responding to Reform Goals and Mandates

Bureaucratic Constraints

- governmental and bureaucratic regulations usually require surveillance and increased paperwork

Fiscal Constraints

Heat in the Age of Reform

Academics or Well-Being

- broader reform efforts often go beyond academics to include a focus on the overall child's well-being
 - the rationale is that one's productivity and prosperity as an adult require an education goes beyond what has been traditionally defined as education for economic and civic responsibility

Accountability and Test Scores

- the emphasis on test scores as the means of accountability is a national phenomenon
- school districts are not allowed the luxury of taking a long-term perspective; they are forced to make quick fixes for those concerned with short-term gains in test scores
- many times superintendents are forced into a pattern of being more interested in stability and assessment reports than in achieving learning for American youth

Decentralization and Leadership

- solutions to our problems in education can neither be discovered nor supported by professionalization; centralization; or bureaucratic, controlling approaches
- solutions must come out of confronting concerns, responding to needs, and supporting meaningful dialogue
 - must develop approaches that create support mechanisms encouraging input, conversation, collaboration, direction finding, goal setting, risk taking, significant action, and broad support for educational improvement

School-Based Leadership

Leadership Versus Maintaining the Status Quo

Chapter Five: Doing More With Less

Income and Tax Inequities

- today's superintendents find themselves caught between employees who want increased wages and resources, middle-class taxpayers who are stretched to the limit, and wealthy taxpayers whose tax burden is being progressively reduced

Fiscal Tightening

- expectations that superintendents find ways to operate and reform schools on dwindling budget, have begun to change the job
 - they begin to lose sight of children's learning as the reason they are in school in the first place

Superintendent Compensation: Coca-Cola and Kids

- another element that has consistently caused problems in public education is the compensating package provided to central office administrators
- superintendents and central office administrators should receive contracts comparable to what CEOs in business receive

Chapter Six: Resolving Conflicts with Boards

-the first order of business for a school board and its superintendent is to build a relationship of trust

Relationships Between School Board and Superintendent

-most studies of superintendent-board relationships conclude that communication, trust, and understanding role differences are the main factors influencing their effectiveness

Tensions Between Superintendent and Board

-superintendents should always inform board members about the reality of what is occurring in schools by presenting it in the most positive light

Factors Affecting Superintendent-Board Tensions

-most mentioned problems are related to:

1. Effective communication
2. Financial matters

Poor Relationships

Reforming School Boards

-improved relationship between board members and superintendent
-creation of a strong induction and development program for board members

Chapter Seven: Coping with Daily Crisis

-on a daily basis, superintendents face budget deficits, problems in academics, desegregation, communication problems, vacancies in key positions, and skepticism

The Damage from Critical Incidents

Employee Misconduct

-superintendent should never assume that in any case that nothing needs to be done

Student Misconduct

-successful approaches often bridge punishment and prevention with positive, proactive alternatives to gangs, reinforcing social networks such as the family, school, and community

Consolidating Schools

-effective superintendents engage participants in a process of continuous improvement and value their input

The Conflicts Ahead

-school superintendents can never be quite sure where or when a critical incident will occur

Chapter Eight: The Personal and Professional Toll

Understanding the Demands of the Job

Finding the Passions

Superintendent Security

Sources of Problems

Top Ranking Problems:

- School finances
- Cost reduction
- Budget cuts
- Covering growing responsibilities with less staff and resources
- Addressing pressures to continuously improve the curriculum and conditions for learning

Personal Attacks

Family Sacrifice

-advancement means a move most often times which can be very disruptive and stressful to families that must leave familiar surroundings

Time Pressures

Survival Skills

Part Three: Responses and Remedies

Chapter Nine: Building Community Alliances

Facilitating and Supporting

- the superintendent needs to bring out the best in people
 - this requires sensitivity to the skills, knowledge, and the experience that internal and external members of the school community have to offer, and the ability to orchestrate those talents in furthering the interests of children

Handling Challenges Effectively

The Religious Right: An Example

Collaboration, Coalition, and Alliance

- the superintendent should focus her attention on the flow of information/communication, representation of disparate ideologies, incorporation of value and belief systems, management of interest and pressure groups, oversight of internal affairs, administrative control, and resource allocation

The Superintendent as Statesperson and Facilitator

- the superintendent provides a sense of interconnectedness and ensures that no group that is needed to support public education feels it is not a full partner in the process
- the challenge to superintendents comes in the need to keep all interested participants informed, to support participation without allowing endless debate, to communicate core values, to create purposeful deliberation, to set and keep ground rules, to respond to new and changing demands, to set specific and attainable achievements, to clearly communicate the vision that evolves, and to help celebrate victories and successes

Broad Based Participation

Chapter Ten: Developing District Capacity

-instead of trying to reduce turmoil and chaos, the superintendent should try to hold the organization within this natural state of evolution until a critical mass of employees gains an understanding of what must be done

-successful innovation requires a superintendent who understands the need for creating order out of chaos but who does not allow employees or communities to short-circuit the needed process of continuous communication, deliberation, and improvement

Continuous Improvement: An Example

-school boards and communities must understand that better education comes only through the pain of confronting the complexities of American life and experimenting with new approaches to promoting more successful student learning

Differentiating Crises and Non crises

Protecting Participants

-superintendents must stand for important values and place students first in all that they do
-the goal should be stability, consistency, and steady progress, not instant results

Old Questions, New Answers

-superintendents must respond to the demands of their external constituencies while encouraging staff members to be innovative and to focus on improving teaching and learning

Reinventing the Central Office

-central office staff members must take on new roles as supporters and enablers of work taking place in the schools
-must focus on helping schools achieve their improvement goals

New Perspectives, New Possibilities, New Knowledge

-Central office educational leaders must engage in mutual inquiry, discovery, and learning
-must create learning communities to illuminate the knowledge needed in the new millennium

Dismantling Central Authority

Service Centers for Schools

Chapter Eleven: Motivating Systematic Change

Understanding Human Systems

-a key to the ongoing effectiveness of any organization is ability to renew itself, to seek and find better ways of fulfilling its mission and responding to change

Pointing the Compass

Capacity to Improve

Compelling Visions: Motivating and Empowering

-superintendent must lead the schools in developing a clear vision of curriculum, instruction, and student achievement connections

-they also must be able to transform ideas into action, to help schools become places of learning that makes a difference in the lives of children

-must engage others in the action and enable them to visualize their ideal schools

Improving School Performance

The Charter School Phenomenon

-some leadership challenges charter schools pose for superintendents are that:

- They require new relationships between school boards and schools
- The utilize true site-based decision making
- The provide new roles for teachers

Part Four: New Directions and Responsibilities

Chapter Twelve: Creating Innovative Schools

Vision as a Driving Force

-challenge to superintendents is to build school systems that are capable of rethinking and recreating schools as institutions that will be responsive to human needs in the twenty-first century

Creating Next-Generation Schools and Citizens

The Culture of Innovation

Possible New Directions for Visionary Schools

Educational Standards and Assessment

The Full-Service School

Other Critical Issues

-superintendents need to develop expertise in a number of areas that might be relevant to their districts

-success requires an improved understanding of student development and ways to help students take responsibility for their behavior and its consequence

Superintendent Reformer

A New Vision

-administrators are being asked to create an environment for children that is conducive to learning and prepares them for a highly technological society