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ABSTRACT

In July 1991, 20 superintendents, who are members of the Urban Superintendents' Network, a coalition of educational leaders sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), participated in a special panel presentation and roundtable discussion entitled "Turnover in the Urban Superintendency: Implications and Ideas for Change." Reporting on the following issues raised and observations made by session participants, this publication: (1) cites data that reveal the average brief tenure of superintendents in urban districts is only 2.5 years; (2) claims that districts have to have a superintendent in position long enough to effect meaningful educational change (lists 25 urban areas that have had superintendent turnover within the past year); (3) provides a case study in Seattle, Washington, of frequent superintendent turnover; (4) observes that superintendents will search for ways to protect themselves from being summarily dismissed; (5) notes how three superintendents view their changing job description; and (6) lists four new programs focusing on superintendent training. The final article is "10 Key Questions for Urban Superintendents," by Lee Etta Powell. Dispersed throughout the issue is a series of recommendations, called "Searching for Solutions," that the participants made for improving and changing a system characterized by high turnover rates. (13 references) (MLF)

SOUNDING BOARD

Vol 1, No 1 REPORTING ON MANAGEMENT ISSUES IN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS Winter 1992

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Urban Superintendent Turnover

The Need for Stability

On July 11 and 12, 1991, twenty superintendents of the nation's largest school systems gathered in Washington, D.C., to discuss issues involving the urban school superintendency. As members of the Urban Superintendents' Network, a coalition of educational leaders sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), these superintendents participated in a special panel presentation and roundtable discussion entitled "Turnover in the Urban Superintendency: Implications and Ideas for Change."

This publication reports on some of the issues raised and observations made by session participants, including urban superintendents, school board members, and educational administrators and consultants. The material included here takes many forms:

- first-hand accounts of the superintendents' experiences as chief administrators in urban districts
- case studies of school systems where frequent superintendent turnover has been a fact of life
- a series of recommendations, called "Searching for Solutions," that the participants made for improving and changing a system characterized by high turnover rates

the new superintendents will remain in their positions long enough to bring about the educational improvements for which they were hired.

Nationally, the average tenure of a superintendent in an urban district is only 2.5 years, compared to a national average of 5.6 years among all superintendents.

A 1989 National School Boards Association (NSBA) survey of urban school districts found that 27 of the

The Severity of the Problem

Just how severe is the problem of urban superintendent turnover? The numbers indicate how frequently superintendents in large school districts are replaced. Last year, 25 urban school districts, more than half of the 47 urban districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools, had vacancies in the superintendent's position. While these vacancies will all soon be filled, the chances are not good that

The average tenure of superintendents in urban districts is only 2.5 years, compared to 5.6 years among all superintendents.

54 urban superintendents responding had been in their positions for three years or less. Eleven of the superintendents were in their initial year in their districts.

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Although urban superintendents usually have plenty of experience—the average total number of years of superintendency experience reported in the NSBA survey was nine—their contracts often do in them to short-term tenures in a series of districts. In response to an item on contract length, 23 urban superintendents indicated that they held three-year contracts, while another 15 reported having four-year contracts. Almost 75 percent of the contracts were not renewable.

A Revolving Door

There are, of course, many success stories of superintendents who have enjoyed long tenure in their positions, but the increasingly common circumstance is for large school districts to become involved in what one school board member refers to as the "revolving door syndrome."

When urban school superintendents lose their jobs or quit in frustration, all levels of the district's educational system feel the consequences—students, teachers, parents, administration, curriculum, finance. The educational careers of students in large urban areas, where enrollments in a single district often number in the hundreds of thousands, are placed at risk.

In the best of circumstances, students, teachers, and others in the educational community in a large urban area have to weather a transitional period while a new superintendent with new ideas and new policies demonstrates the ability to oversee, among other things, the district's educational, fiscal, personnel, and public relations departments, with total budgets often running well over \$500 million.

T H E C H A N G I N G SUPERINTENDENCY

reasons for the high turnover rate among urban school superintendents. The job description itself keeps changing; the political environment that dictates the direction education takes keeps changing; the demands of students, parents, teachers, and other groups involved in education keep changing. Special interest groups occupy powerful positions that dictate much of what a superintendent can and cannot do. The stress of functioning successfully in a diverse and highly challenging work environment can be overwhelming.

Many suggestions have been made for creating greater administrative stability in urban school districts. Some people believe that the entire governance structure of urban schools must be redesigned if superinten-

dents are to be effective leaders in educational improvement.

Superintendents themselves are aware that they, too, must change. They must develop new skills for coping with the greater demands being made on their time, talent, and commitment to urban education. They must improve and refine the ways they interrelate with a growing range of educational stakeholders. They must seek new and creative ways of managing districts in urban settings.

Urban school superintendents of the 1990s, it seems, must prepare themselves for perpetual change. They know that, to succeed, they must develop skills that allow them to respond to the dramatic changes affecting educational management as they lead their districts toward educational excellence.

Under the worst of circumstances, continuity in programs suffers, morale weakens, new political factions quickly form, a sometimes protracted search to find a suitable replacement takes place, and the whole foundation of the district's stability and vitality crumbles. Getting things moving again can take years, a luxury urban school districts can ill afford.

The Challenge of Change

Sometimes change is good. If things aren't moving, if things aren't improving, changes should be made. But the alarm-

ingly high rate at which school superintendents in large cities are leaving or being asked to leave their jobs has many worried. Many educators, administrators, and involved citizens are beginning to call for changes in a system that breeds such high turnover rates.

The men and women who are the subject of all the discussion—urban school superintendents themselves—are all too aware of the problem, since they are the ones with most at stake, both professionally and personally. Their mission of continually improving the education of



"Turnover in the Urban Superintendency: Implications and Ideas for Change"

Urban Superintendents' Network Meeting,
July 11-12, 1991, Washington, D.C.

Moderator

Thomas Fayzant, Superintendent, San Diego City Schools

Panel

Floretta Dukes McKenzie, President, The McKenzie Group, Washington, D.C.

Lee Etta Powell, Superintendent, Cincinnati Public Schools

Robert Braddock, President, Cincinnati Board of Education

Ellen Roe, Member, Seattle Board of Education

Stephanie Parker, Assistant Director, National Center on School Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana—Champaign

Urban Superintendents' Network Participants

Lester W. Butts, Superintendent, Atlanta Public Schools

Richard C. Hunter, Superintendent, Baltimore City Public Schools

Cleveland Hammonds, Superintendent, Birmingham Public Schools

Albert Thompson, Superintendent, Buffalo Public Schools

Frank J. Huml, Superintendent, Cleveland Public Schools

Octavio Visiedo, Superintendent, Dade County (Florida) Public Schools

Deborah McGriff, General Superintendent, Detroit Public Schools

Franklin L. Smith, Superintendent, District of Columbia Public Schools

Donald W. Ingwerson, Superintendent, Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools

William Anton, Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District

Robert J. Ferrera, Superintendent, Minneapolis Public Schools

Everett J. Williams, Superintendent, New Orleans Public Schools

Eugene C. Campbell, Executive Superintendent, Newark Public Schools

Arthur W. Steller, Superintendent, Oklahoma City Public Schools

Richard C. Wallace, Jr., Superintendent, Pittsburgh Public Schools

William M. Kendrick, Superintendent, Seattle School District #1

Lillian C. Barna, Superintendent, Tacoma Public Schools

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS: Communication

" I think that as we work with the issue of urban superintendent turnover, we've got to create opportunities of open dialogue. Personally I would like to see discussions about the urban superintendency on the programs of such groups as the AASA and NSBA. There isn't enough dialogue about what's happening. And sometimes there's not enough dialogue about the successes that superintendents are having, so that maybe their programs can be replicated in other districts."

—Floretta Dukes McKenzie, President, The McKenzie Group

their student constituents, many of whom are at-risk youngsters being taught in substandard schools surrounded by a decaying urban infrastructure, is difficult enough to accomplish. But add the many roadblocks placed in the superintendent's way by outside forces—social, political, and financial—and the task of leading an urban school system can become practically impossible.

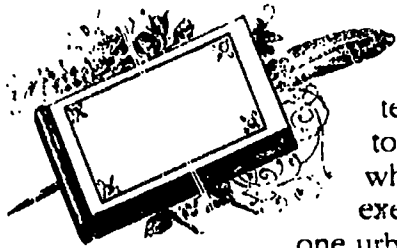
These outside forces, rather than purely educational ones, are often the direct cause of why so many urban school superintendents have been fired or have resigned.

The warning about urban superintendent turnover is coming from all quarters—the national press, big-city newspapers, academic journals, professional organizations, and educational administrators

and consultants. The message is loud and clear: The problem of urban school superintendent turnover has reached crisis proportions, presenting yet another challenge to improving the quality of education in U.S. cities. The problem is, is anyone listening? And more importantly, what can be done?

SB

S U P E R I N T E N D E N T S C H O O L B O A R D R E L A T I O N S



The consensus among superintendents is that there is a new breed of board members whose characteristics have changed dramatically in the last few decades.

"Why don't you just get tough and tell the school board to go to hell?" That's what corporate executives have asked

one urban superintendent when he describes the difficult, delicate process of working with the diverse members of his local board of education. He is quick to remind his corporate advisors that profound differences exist between CEO-board relations in the private sector and superintendent-board relations in the field of education. He says he tells corporate CEOs, "Remember, you appoint board members who are supportive of what you do. I don't have that luxury."

Since boards of education hire and fire urban school superintendents, they always figure prominently in discussions of superintendent turnover. Board members, who in most cases are elected to their seats, sometimes have private agendas and public constituencies that often dictate their actions and attitudes toward the school district and the superintendent running it.

The Changing Board of Education

The consensus among superintendents is that there is a new breed of board members whose characteristics have changed dramatically in the last few decades. Some board members have insisted on becoming more

and more involved in administration rather than in policy formulation. As one superintendent describes it:

"We see a younger group of board members, a group not content in the role of policymaker. They see their role as much more legislative in nature, where they take testimony and say to the superintendent, 'We'll put your testimony and your recommendations right along with all these other groups we've talked to, and we'll decide which recommendation we want to take.'"

Another close observer of superintendent-board relations agrees: "We have board members who are very much into administration; they don't believe that policy is their only role. When a board member wants to tell the superintendent how to carry out policy, that's when animosity begins to set in."

Coalition Building

Most superintendents quickly establish positive working relationships with the various members of their school boards, but the relationship is always a fragile one that balances personalities, educational principles, and political motivations. Some superintendents have learned to build coalitions and support groups that offset the power of individual board members.

For example, Thomas Payzant, superintendent of the San Diego City Schools for the past eight years, found that the experience of working with different boards over the years helped him learn some important lessons about maintaining his educational principles while building a strong working relationship with his ever-changing board of education. He once believed there was only one way to survive in the superintendent's position, but he has now learned that superintendents "can maintain their independence by working in different ways with different boards."

The key, Payzant says, is to "understand the political nature of the superintendent's role." Building community coalitions and earning the support of teaching and administrative staff can diffuse the power of the board and bring pressure to bear on their decisions to fire or rehire superintendents, Payzant says.

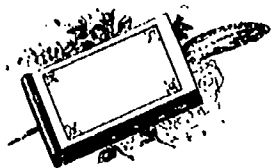
Octavio Visiedo, the new superintendent of Dade County (Florida) Public Schools, has also practiced Payzant's advice. He says that when he took the job of superintendent he recognized that the members of his board would change over the years, so he immediately tried to "build a base in different areas of the community, to coalesce

groups, to have them understand what my administration was about."

Visiedo believes such coalition-building pays off because board members pay attention to community support. "The message gets back to board members and increases their confidence in what their superintendent is doing," he says. "I think you can be politically astute, and not necessarily at the expense of the students either, to do what it takes to keep a balance and to keep some degree of pressure on the board."

Facing the Facts

Urban superintendents occasionally have to face the fact that their own educational values must at least approximate those of the community in which they serve, or they are doomed to failure. As Deborah McGriff, newly hired general superintendent for the Detroit Public Schools, points out, "It depends on what your community wants. If you're from a community that doesn't value standardized test scores, raising them won't matter. Incompatibility between board members and the superintendent is often due to differing values. As a superintendent, when you go against a basic community belief, you're not going to be there very long."



THE SERIOUSNESS of THE PROBLEM

FLORETTA DUKES MCKENZIE, former superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools and now president of The McKenzie Group, a consulting firm working with school districts in their superintendent searches, thinks the past year has been an unparalleled one in the area of urban superintendent turnover. "We've experienced an unprecedented number of vacancies in the urban superintendency," she says. "I don't think that there has been another year in the history of public education in this country when so many urban superintendencies were vacant."

McKenzie notes that the problem is worsened by the fact that there is such a small pool of qualified candidates available to fill the vacancies. She has direct experience in witnessing the decline in the applicant pool, having been involved in superintendent searches where districts expected to receive up to 100 applications and wound up with only 30 after an intensive search.

Unrealistic Expectations

Perhaps the greatest source of the urban superintendent turnover problem is the unrealistic expectations school boards and other educational stakeholders have about

what urban superintendents can accomplish. McKenzie describes a typical problem she has faced in helping school boards identify good candidates for urban superintendent positions:

"Boards still describe the persons that they want in the superintendency as people who can walk on water. There's nobody alive who can meet the composite of characteristics they demand. So we often find ourselves trying to explain to boards that they need to be realistic. Boards are not going to have it all, but they still think they can have it all."

Researching the Board

One solution McKenzie suggests is for both parties to research each other carefully prior to hiring. She believes superintendents need to investigate superintendent-board relationships before they accept a position:

"It used to be that when applicants would take the job of the superintendency, they had no idea of what the working relationship with the board would be. More and more, superintendents are exploring important questions, such as 'How does this board operate?' and 'Does it understand the difference between policy, practice, and implementation?' Prospective superintendents are trying to clarify some of those issues early

"We've experienced an unprecedented number of vacancies in the urban superintendency."

on. They may not stay clarified, but at least there is now some discussion of the nature of the working relationship, and the discussion should continue."

Urban superintendents long ago learned that too much will probably be expected of them. McKenzie thinks the problem might be overcome by better educating the public about the constraints under which urban superintendents work. She says there is a need to help people "understand that they need to be much more realistic about what a person in the superintendent's role can do given the present situation, with resources dwindling and the demands increasing."

SB

STABILITY, LEADERSHIP, AND URBAN SUPERINTENDENT TURNOVER

"You have to have a superintendent in position long enough to effect meaningful educational change."

Allowing Time for Success

No one would expect a newly hired chief executive officer of a multimillion dollar corporation to restructure the various parts of a failing company and have the business showing record profits in a period of one or two years. Yet many of the superintendents hired to take over urban school districts find themselves in a very similar situation.

Most people realize that it takes time to bring about the kinds of positive changes necessary to improve the quality of urban education. Given sufficient time, superintendents can plan, implement, and evaluate new programs and policies that can gradually lead to improvement. Having time to bring about meaningful change means cultivating a stable, cooperative environment in which to accomplish goals that lead to better educated youth in cities throughout America.

But with the urban superintendent turnover rate as high as it is, many cities can no longer provide a stable environment in which students can learn. One long-term school board member says that stability in the superintendency is essential "because when the top changes, you get changes rippling down and up and down again. It's not healthy for a school system when that happens too often. You have to have a superintendent in position long enough

to effect meaningful educational change."

Understandably, everyone involved in urban education would like to see immediate improvement in every district's financial condition, student test scores, curriculum, dropout rates, teaching and administrative staff, physical facilities, and all the other components of a successful school system. Superintendents, perhaps more than anyone else, want to see that kind of improvement, too, and their knowledge, training, and expertise puts them in an especially good position to bring it about—if they have the time to do so.

The greatest concern among superintendents is the effect of constant change on the ability of their students to learn. As one superintendent puts it, "Who suffers? The kids, because they don't have the continuity. They don't have the stability in terms of leadership, and programs keep changing. It's a revolving door not only with people but with programs. Strategic plans get into practice and then they get changed."

That's why *stability* is one of the first words that come up in discussions of the urban superintendent turnover problem—because *stability* is also one of the first things school districts lose when superintendents are replaced too frequently.

ACCORDING TO the Council of the Great City Schools, school districts in these urban areas have had superintendent turnover within the past year.

- Anchorage, Alaska
- Baltimore, Maryland
- Boston, Massachusetts
- Cincinnati, Ohio
- Cleveland, Ohio
- Columbus, Ohio
- Dade County, Florida
- Dayton, Ohio
- Denver, Colorado
- Detroit, Michigan
- El Paso, Texas
- Fresno, California
- Houston, Texas
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Los Angeles, California
- Memphis, Tennessee
- Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Phoenix, Arizona
- Rochester, New York
- St. Louis, Missouri
- St. Paul, Minnesota
- Toledo, Ohio
- Tucson, Arizona
- Tulsa, Oklahoma
- Washington, D.C.



THE SEATTLE STORY

Stability not only in the superintendency but in the composition of the school board is a vital element in operating a successful big-city school system. The schools in Seattle, Washington, provide an especially good case study in the cycles an urban area goes through when the superintendent and members of the school board are replaced too frequently.

A Superintendent's View

After a period of frequent turnover, the Seattle superintendency has now stabilized. It is now the school board that continues to experience turnover. William Kendrick, superintendent of the Seattle Public Schools for the past five years, has first-hand experience with the difficulties that come with instability. "It's very difficult when you don't have continuity and stability, first at the board level, then at the superintendent level," Kendrick says. "You start to get some new initiatives going and then there are new faces."

When superintendent turnover occurs, says Kendrick, a pattern develops where "you get a new player and start over again. You get back to ground zero and survive for a few more years while that person works at it and then goes, and you start again."

Because the board membership has changed constantly, Kendrick has had to prepare for different

agendas every year. "In five years as superintendent, I've had five new board members with agendas," he says. "There will be four board seats up for consideration in November, and then there could be a whole new game plan."

What does that do to a superintendent's decision-making powers? Kendrick says he does what any superintendent would have to do: "I have to try to keep the district going and keep the stability and keep it running so that we can hopefully achieve the goals and objectives we set out to accomplish—to help our kids to become winners."

A Board Member's View

Ellen Roe, a 16-year veteran of the Seattle Board of Education, has worked with six different superintendents while serving on the board. During her first four years of service, board membership remained the same, an increasing rarity for urban school boards these days.

Roe recalls that the stability gained from having the same board and superintendent made a big difference. "We made a lot of progress and did very well," she says. "Then we had two superintendents who each served about two-and-a-half years, and the reputation of the city and board suffered, and it's taken a long time to dispel that reputation and problem."

Repairing the Damage

Roe and some of her fellow board members began to understand the damage that resulted from constant turnover in the superintendency. "It took a long time in Seattle for a couple of us to really convince some of the people in the downtown communities, some of the parent organizations, some of the minority groups, that stability was one of the things that would help bring a sense of cohesiveness to the district," she says. "The constant changes were not healthy; it didn't pay."

It required a great deal of time and public relations work to turn the situation around. "It took a lot of going to meetings, talking with people in the organizations, and even going to the newspaper editorial boards so that they editorialized on the issue as well," Roe says.

Fortunately, she thinks her efforts and those of her colleagues have turned the tide on Seattle's tendency to hire and fire superintendents too frequently. "I think they have finally understood in Seattle that stability is a very important issue in a school district," she says.

SB

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS: School Board Training

Board members should have mandatory training. All board members that are going to sit on a board in a district with more than 10,000 students should have at least three days of training. One day should cover financial data—where the money comes from, how it is spent, and why. Another day should be spent on the full hierarchy of educational organizations, not just in the state but elsewhere as well, because all the parts fit into the puzzle that makes up education. A third day should be spent on boardsmanship issues. Board members ought to have this kind of training before they are seated."

—Ellen Roe, Member,
Seattle Board
of Education

SEARCHING
FOR SOLUTIONS:
Communication

"We need to be talking to organizations such as the American Association of School Administrators, the National School Boards Association, the Business Roundtable, and the National Chamber of Commerce. The bulk of the school districts in this country are small. These organizations try to build their programs for the majority of school districts, and there isn't that much interest in the urban scene. I think that basically we have to help people understand the nature of the urban superintendency, the nature of the diverse kinds of situations we face, our diverse populations."

—William Kendrick,
Superintendent, Seattle
School District #1.

H I R E D F O R A
QUICK FIX

then fired

IN AN AGE WHEN THE miraculous "quick-fix" is expected, some people fear that we are returning to the days when superintendents were sometimes hired to achieve a specific goal and then were summarily dismissed as soon as it was accomplished.

One observer of the urban superintendent scene recalls that only two or three decades ago some superintendents were hired to desegregate schools within a district; as soon as they had accomplished the feat, they were let go. She worries that a similar pattern might be developing again, this time involving such issues as budget-cutting.

If this is indeed the case, superintendents faced with that reality will search for ways to protect themselves from those circumstances. "Is it possible," she asks, "for superintendents to do the research on the district to know beforehand what the real agenda is so that they know what they're going into and can negotiate a contract that will get them in to do a 'quick-and-dirty' job, and then get out and still maintain credibility?"

SB

SEARCHING
FOR SOLUTIONS:
Image-Building

"Urban superintendents, as a group, do not have a voice. How, then, are they going to be viewed nationally? If we're really going to address the issue of superintendent turnover, then we're going to have to address the issue of what the overriding image of the superintendency is in American education today. We must also address how the position itself can get the acceptance it needs and how it can be an influential position in addressing educational issues outside the local school district."

—I. Etta Powell,
Superintendent,
Cincinnati Public Schools

THE CHANGING JOB Description

"Now, many people in education are more interested in process. They want to change the way things function. Superintendents must deal with process now."

DON INGWERSON may well be the dean of all urban superintendents, at least in terms of the length of his tenure. He has been a superintendent for more than 20 years, the last 11 of those as superintendent of the Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools, which includes the schools in the Louisville metropolitan area. With this length of service, Ingwerson has a good personal knowledge of the changes occurring in the urban superintendency during the last two decades.

Ingwerson recounts that, as a young superintendent, he came to the job with a well-developed set of instructional and management skills. However, as enrollments grew, communication skills became more and more important in his work. At the urban level, where superintendents must accommodate almost endless diversity, good communication skills are essential, but that alone won't guarantee success. "You have to be a vision setter, too," Ingwerson points out.

Ingwerson found that his frequent dealings with legal professionals, minority groups, educational consultants, and others required constant refinement of old skills and continual acquisition of new ones. "If you can't deal with multiple groups, you won't survive," he says. Such personal qualities as leadership, the ability to bring about change, and risk-taking have been added to the urban superintendent's required arsenal of skills over the years.

One source of the problem of urban superintendent turnover is inadequate training, Ingwerson believes. "The

superintendent of today has not been educated for the job," he says.

Changing Skills for Changing Times

Other superintendents agree that the skills and characteristics necessary for effective urban school management have changed radically in the past few years. Richard Hunter, who until recently was the superintendent of the Baltimore Public Schools, thinks that a major shift in focus has occurred in the superintendency. "Superintendents traditionally have had an orientation toward outcomes," he says. "The states require outcomes for measuring success, so superintendents have gotten used to that focus. Now, many people in education are more interested in process. They want to change the way things function. Superintendents must deal with process now."

Octavio Visiedo, Dade County (Florida) superintendent of schools, thinks that marketing skills are a vital component of a modern urban superintendent's work. "I think the issue of perception is really very, very important," he says. "The superintendency has become a marketing job, and I think that is a new part of our job description. We used to be able to just focus in on our product, but now we've got to sell ourselves, and that's part of the agenda."

Addressing the Need

Several new programs focusing on superintendent training are being developed around the country to help meet the need for improved preparation of urban school superintendents. A few of these programs are outlined below.

• At the University of Pittsburgh, Richard Wallace, superintendent of the Pittsburgh Public Schools, is heading up the Superintendent Preparation Program.

• Lee Etta Powell, currently professor of educational leadership and superintendent in residence at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., is helping to develop a Leadership Program for Administrators.

• The National Center for School Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has formed the National Commission on the Urban Superintendency, which will address issues related to urban superintendent training and turnover.

• Harvard University has established a three-year, full-time doctoral program for urban superintendents. Headed by Robert S. Peterkin, former superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools, the program offers seminars, courses, and internships to prospective urban superintendents.

SB

10 KEY QUESTIONS FOR URBAN SUPERINTENDENTS

What is the real role of the urban superintendent? Is it that of educator, leader, manager, politician, or footstool for the board of education?

LEE ETTA POWELL,

former superintendent of the Cincinnati Public Schools and now professor of educational leadership and superintendent in residence at The George Washington University, has many years of experience as an urban school superintendent.

Below, she poses ten questions and offers some commentary on issues directly related to the problem of urban superintendent turnover.

1 *What is the real role of the urban superintendent? Is it that of educator, leader, manager, politician, or footstool for the board of education?*

2 *How does one assess the political/educational climate of a school district?* I would offer that sometimes the political climate is more pervasive and drives the community more so than interest in the education of young people, and that becomes a very real problem for a superintendent who is interested in education.

3 *Is there an accurate way to establish a genuine profile of a board of education as one either enters a school district or works with a school board?* People have many different personalities, some that they put forward and some that they exercise in other arenas. The profile of the board of education is very, very important in terms of what their interests are, what their issues are, and whether the issues and interests they hold are consistent with the published goals of the school district.

4 *What does one do in an urban community that is really not education oriented, either out of a lack of a thrust or a lack of a passion and urgency about the education of urban youth?* I see this problem occurring in environments where there is a tendency to have a few centers of excellence and then write off the other youngsters who are poor, hungry, and disenfranchised. How does the superintendent turn the community's attitude around?

5 *Is the urban superintendent expected, by the board or by the community, to manage the school district with the union president?* As we read our educational journals, as we visit educational environments, including the city of Cincinnati, there seems to me to be a tendency for teacher union presidents to view themselves as cosuperintendents and drive the educational agenda, perhaps sometimes superseding board authority as well as superintendent authority and responsibility. This idea has nothing to do with shared decision-making, and my comment does not mean that the superintendent should be the authoritarian leader because he or she is the titular leader of the school district. That's not the concept I'm speaking of. It's a matter of what the appropriate role is of these various constituent groups.

6 *How can a candidate for a superintendent's position know if or when he or she has been called in to do a quick and dirty job?* How can the candidate know whether condi-

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS: Restructuring

I maintain that you will always see limited successes if the current mentality of treating the symptoms rather than treating the cause continues. As long as you limit yourself to educational goals like producing employees and reducing dropout rates rather than putting into position plans that attack the problem, there will always be short-term job placement. You have to be in the forefront rather than being satisfied with the status quo. Until there is a holistic approach to providing what the child needs to be productive and respected in today's world, there will always be a problem with superintendent job stability. My theory is that the definition of school itself must change."

*—Robert Braddock,
President, Cincinnati Board of
Education*

tions may later be contrived to force separation?

7 *Is it possible for superintendents to survive where the political agenda supersedes the educational agenda? When I say "political agenda," I'm talking about personal political agendas of not only board members but of other people in the community who would like to use school districts as the cause célèbre for their political ambitions.*

8 *How can a superintendent establish lines of responsibility in these days of collaboration with other agencies? Boundary management is becoming an area that has to receive careful consideration as school districts enter into collaborative efforts. Boundary management does not mean that superintendents should say, "This is mine and this is yours." Instead, they should establish the lines of responsibility and the lines of authority, along with identifying the expected outcomes for all the participants.*

9 *Is it really possible to establish the fact that the superintendent is the CEO of the school district and therefore should be afforded the kind of respect, the kind of treatment and acceptance, as befits a CEO?*

I used the term *CEO* advisedly, knowing that being a school superintendent requires some requisite skills and body of knowledge about organizational behavior with which to direct the school district. If this idea is, in fact, accepted, then one doesn't become involved in circumstances where there is conflict between policy responsibilities and administrative responsibilities.

10 *How can the superintendency be designed to allow effective management of personal time? All the superintendents with whom I talk seem to know that this is a very, very real issue. And it doesn't matter whether the superintendent is male or female, married or divorced, or has children. Managing personal time seems to become an issue. Superintendents can, and I would say they *should*, negotiate a contract that allows for personal time to be something that is respected because it is needed. The board should respect it because they should want the superintendent to have that necessary personal time. I talked with a superintendent in the last couple of weeks who said that the board demanded that he take a vacation. And I said to him, "You'd better love your board to death!"*

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS: Superintendent Training

Some of the skills superintendents now need are new skills and are not taught in academia. We need to talk about the skills that are needed today in the superintendency because they are very different from the skills that were needed in the past."

*—Floretta Dukes
McKenzie, President,
The McKenzie Group*

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS: School Board Recruitment

In Pittsburgh, a council on education has provided a grant to hire a full-time person to identify and recruit qualified applicants to run for the school board. All cities need this kind of program."

*—Richard C. Wallace, Jr.,
Superintendent, Pittsburgh
Public Schools*

R E S O U R C E S

Urban superintendents are not the only voices calling attention to the rapid turnover rate in their positions. The national press and big-city newspapers have devoted many pages to reporting the behind-the-scenes stories that created the latest urban superintendent vacancy. The popular and academic educational press, too, has joined in by featuring articles and studies of the urban superintendency.

Below is a list of some recent material that offers further information on urban superintendent turnover.

"Big City Schools: Turmoil at the Top," by Laurel Shaper Walters. *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 13, 14, 17, 1991.

"Attracting the Best," by Floretta Dukes McKenzie. *The American School Board Journal*, April 1991.

"Big-City Blues," by David A. Bennett. *The American School Board Journal*, April 1991.

"Urban C.E.O.'s: Untangling the Governance Knot," by Oliver S. Brown, Robert S. Peterkin, and Leonard B. Finkelstein. *Education Week*, March 13, 1991.

"School Board Turmoil and Superintendent Turnover: What Pushes Them to the Brink?" by Marilyn L. Grady and Miles T. Bryant. *The School Administrator*, February 1991.

"School-Chief Woes Spur Call for Change in Big-City Boards," by Lynn Olson. *Education Week*, January 30, 1991.

"Rapid Turnover in Urban Superintendencies Prompts Calls for Reform in Governance," by Ann Bradley. *Education Week*, December 15, 1990.

"Paid Not to Work," by Donna Harrington-Lueker. *The American School Board Journal*, April 1990.

"Happily Ever After," by Carla Yock, Katherine E. Keough, Kenneth E. Underwood, and Jim C. Fortune. *The American School Board Journal*, January 1990.

"Making It in the Big City," by Jonathan C. Wilson. *The Executive Educator*, September 1991.

The Superintendency in the Nineties: What Superintendents and Board Members Need to Know, by M. William Konnert and John J. Augenstein. Technomic Publishing Co., 1990.

"A Survey of Public Education in the Nation's Urban School Districts, 1989." National School Boards Association, Council of Urban Boards of Education. Available from Special Program Services Department, National School Boards Association, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.

"The Lure of the Big Time," by Ira W. Krinsky and Charles W. Rudiger. *The Executive Educator*, September 1991.

THE URBAN SUPERINTENDENTS'

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