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PUBLIC EDUCATION

Unlocking Potential:
How Political Skill Can Maximize Superintendent Effectiveness

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Introduction

Local superintendents must do an important job while equipped with, at best, modest authority. Superintendents are ultimately responsible for all the schools in their district, and they at least nominally supervise everything that happens in those schools. Yet superintendents can't count on obedience or even support from the people who work for them, given that both educators and administrators possess wide discretion in implementation.

No matter how much they know about teaching and learning, superintendents can accomplish very little without gaining the cooperation of others who aren't compelled to go along. Teachers, principals, central office staff, school board members, city officials, interest groups, and, in some cases state officials, all have their own jobs to do and their own ways of ignoring or thwarting the superintendent's initiatives.

Superintendents are responsible for an activity of great practical and moral importance. But expert power and moral authority can't negate the fact that a superintendent is effective or ineffective to the degree that they can induce others to act in particular ways.

A superintendent who wants to accomplish something important—putting in place a new reading or math curriculum, improving teacher skills, providing schools more flexibility, or using chartering to create new options, for example—must work through others, on whose enthusiasm and skill the results will depend. The same is true if a district faces enrollment declines or rapid changes in student population that require major changes in spending, staffing, and methods. Superintendents can identify problems and point to solutions, but they (and their districts) will fail if they can't get action and if others (central office staff, principals, teachers, independent providers, parents) respond grudgingly and don't fully use their skills and imagination.

To be influential, a superintendent must take an expansive view of what can be done, who their allies may be, and what they might do together. The traditional vision of the superintendent as a high priest of instructional method who works only within the community of professional educators is grievously limiting. So is the image of the superintendent as a pure administrator, who works within a fixed institutional structure and sticks to their prescribed duties. Even more limiting is the image of the outsider superintendent as ideologue or political careerist who does not know or care about what happens in schools. Superintendents are both educators and politicians. A person who knows only one aspect of the role must get out of their comfort zone.

This paper is written to help current and potential superintendents see the full scope of their role and how leaders from various backgrounds can approach it. In a series of studies beginning in the late 1980s, the authors have interviewed superintendents about their successes and failures in building civic support for needed initiatives.[1] This paper draws examples from this earlier work, as well as from CRPE's ongoing tracking of developments in reform-driven cities and, importantly, the experiences of other public officials whose ability to overcome the structural limitations of their roles offer important lessons for district leadership.

Most superintendents, current and aspiring, understand the importance of getting along with other power centers in the school system and the community at large. This paper goes further by attempting to show how superintendents can build coalitions and thereby exercise real power to accomplish things that conventional wisdom would say are beyond them.

Drawing From the Experience of Other Public Officials

A broad body of literature exists on how superintendents can play their expert and moral leadership roles, but there's relatively little on how superintendents can persuade people whom they can't control but on whom their success depends. Inspiration and good example matter, but they are seldom enough. While K–12 public education aims to benefit children, it depends on support from adults, each of whom has their own vision of what children need and what the community should provide. Parents, teachers, taxpayers, employers, colleges and universities, neighborhood leaders, and city leaders all agree that education is important, but they inevitably disagree about what children should learn, what should be expected of families, how teachers should be compensated, how much taxpayers should contribute, who should be taxed most heavily, etc. No two groups see matters exactly the same way, so agreement is far from automatic.

However, superintendents are not the only officials who are effective only to the degree that they can influence others, and there are very good analyses of how other public officials can overcome the weaknesses of their offices to exercise real power.

Readers might be surprised that the office considered the most powerful in the world, the presidency of the United States, is also very weak relative to what incumbents hope to accomplish and the general public expects of it. To get laws passed, they must deal with 535 independently elected officials. Presidents' unilateral actions (issuing executive orders, for example) can be thwarted by judges, bureaucrats, and state and local officials. Even orders to military officers and executive branch officials can be ignored, cherry-picked, or set aside indefinitely for later action.

In seeking a framework for analysis of ways superintendents might pursue to increase their influence, we turned to a classic analysis of public sector leadership, Richard E. Neustadt's 1960 book *Presidential Power*.[2] Neustadt shows how the presidency, like the superintendency, is weak in light of all the events that presidents need to influence if they are to achieve anything.[3] He lays out three principles, which we have reworded so they apply to superintendents:

- A superintendent cannot accomplish a great deal entirely on their own authority. The best use of the clear authorities the superintendent does possess is in bargaining and building coalitions by offering or threatening to take particular actions in exchange for actions to be taken by others.

- A superintendent's ability to make bargains depends on their professional reputation, which can be enhanced by having clear goals, being resilient, being a trustworthy and reliable ally, and following through.

- In taking any action, a superintendent should consider its consequences for their power—for example, their ability to bargain effectively in the future.

Superintendents can't and shouldn't act as if they were presidents, but they can fully understand their own advantages and think hard about how to bargain and build coalitions effectively with others in the city, school board, central office, and schools. While some hard-charging superintendents have swept aside interest group politics in favor of personality-driven reform agendas, their success seldom survives the next school board election.

The resolution of any important question depends on someone assembling a strong enough coalition to prevail over the long term. Though on occasion mayors might assemble diverse sources of support for change in education, typically only the superintendent has the breadth of vision and the authority to bargain with diverse interests and build coalitions to support needed action.

The sections that follow show how superintendents can think politically and provide examples of successful coalition building. These inevitably isolate particular actions that are in fact interrelated, from bargaining and building up a base of support over time to assembling coalitions for positive action, overcoming resistance, and preventing others from building coalitions against them. While novels are much better than academic papers at encompassing the full complexity of political leadership, it can be analyzed as a series of discrete actions, as we have done here.

Bargaining and Building Coalitions

Superintendents' legal status and authority vary from state to state. Their powers are considerable, but taken alone they are not enough to ensure attaining ambitious goals, like generally improving teaching, creating new schools to fight enrollment decline, fuller integration of technology into classrooms, or transforming opportunities for children from low-income households or children of color.

Even if superintendents use their powers consistently, no great things will happen unless others, from school board members and central office staff to teachers, principals, and parents, also change the ways they act. It's never enough for a superintendent to frame a vision or make an argument. Every action is political in the sense that it must gain the support of independent actors who have different perspectives and goals. To be effective, superintendents must back up their visions and arguments by using their formal powers strategically to bargain and build up a base of support over time. They assemble coalitions for positive actions, overcome resistance, and prevent others from building coalitions against them. The cast of characters will vary over time and from issue to issue, but to be effective, a superintendent will always need to persuade others who might go along but don't have to.

To be effective, superintendents must bargain and build coalitions *within* the district: with the school board, central office, unions, school leaders, and teachers. But because leverage over these groups is limited, and because change within the district sometimes requires injections of financial and political resources from outside, the superintendent must sometimes also bargain for support from actors *outside* the district, including the mayor and city government, business, higher education, cultural institutions, state officials, and parents.

Bargaining and Building Coalitions Within the District

School board. With few exceptions, superintendents must work with elected local boards. As we have heard from interviews with district leaders over the decades, these relationships can be a source of chaos, as superintendents must respond to the diverse concerns of board members representing different constituencies and different parts of the city.

Boards vary over time and from city to city. Most board members seek the office because they care about children and are open to collaboration. But there's no denying that some board members have one-issue agendas or seek to build their own reputations at the superintendent's expense. Superintendents can try to work with or around such people, but in the long run what matters is keeping a working majority, which might never include some members.

Superintendents need allies on the board. A strong board chair can be an extremely valuable partner. Savvy superintendents also work to understand and demonstrate concern over what individual board members care most about, as these issues provide windows into the constituencies that board members are incentivized to serve. There is no substitute for face-to-face meetings with individual board members. Sometimes these conversations will bring conflicts to the surface, but even then, the superintendent and board members might be willing to come to practical agreements and tradeoffs—for example, about amendments that will make a

proposal less unacceptable, a concession on another issue in return for silence rather than explicit opposition, or a broader action that can accomplish both parties' goals. Superintendents don't require a White House staff to blanket the school board with phone calls and negotiate on every item under consideration. But they can use their own time and that of a few key aides and external allies to decide when intervention is possible and what kinds of deals can be made.

Central office. Superintendents also must work with and through their district central offices. Key central office staffers often have deep roots in the community; some also occupy jobs that exist because of federal program requirements or court orders. These nominal subordinates of the superintendents don't need to do something just because the superintendent says so.

Some superintendents write off their central offices as intractable and look for ways to work around them, even by creating new organizations to administer key initiatives, as Alan Bersin did in San Diego. Others, like Joel Klein in New York City, have contracted out work (for example, instructional advice and teacher training) to nonprofits, with mixed results. However, superintendents often find that opposition comes from only one or two internal groups. Intractable units can sometimes be bypassed or dealt with by reassigning key staff. But to survive the inevitable backlash, superintendents must treat affected individuals with conspicuous fairness and to give external groups reasons to understand that such actions are necessary to accomplish important goals.

Superintendents whose improvement strategy involves increasing school freedom of action and accountability must communicate clear expectations for how central office units will work and enforce those expectations quickly and clearly. We have argued elsewhere that central office "re-culturing" is most likely to be effective when funds for services are allocated directly to schools.[4] The superintendent must be positioned to learn about and resolve any disputes that arise—whether between central office units and school leaders or within the central office itself.

Superintendents who want the central office to act in unaccustomed ways—for example, responding to principals instead of telling them what to do, procuring what schools want when they want it, and minimizing demands on principals' and teachers' time—need to expect things to occasionally go wrong. They must overcome skepticism by being specific about what they expect the central office to do and by putting themselves in a position to learn when things go right (and provide rewards in the form of praise) and when they don't (and intervene so everyone knows the superintendent is serious). In Denver, for example, Superintendent Tom Boasberg required central office unit heads to attend his meetings with school leaders and pledge action.

Current and former superintendents told us of using the annual planning process required by federal programs like Title I to call attention to issues and press for changes, such as directing staff to use federal reporting to commit to solutions for staffing at challenged schools or equity in per-pupil funding. Though superintendents know they ultimately will approve grant proposals, veteran leaders told us that a lot can be accomplished by turning down a first draft and sending it back with specific critiques and suggestions. Even when funds are allocated by formula, the superintendent can affect priorities by guiding the proposal writing process. "Superintendents seem oblivious to the power of the purse," one district leader we interviewed said.

Resetting the Central Office

When Cleveland Superintendent Eric Gordon tried to strengthen the principalship by giving schools greater control over spending, he had to work hard to reorient key parts of the central office. Gordon needed to both dispel traditional misunderstandings of state purchasing requirements and make sure central office members did not delay or undercut the changes by making discouraging remarks to principals. Gordon's alliance with the chief financial officer, his ability to get clarification from the state, and respectful efforts to bring subordinate financial staff along eventually made it possible for principals to operate as promised, but Gordon anticipated new challenges as school freedoms were expanded further.

Unions. A superintendent must know when to challenge and when to go along with the teachers union and other unions, such as ones representing school administrators. These groups will be allies on many issues, but they are likely to oppose changes in their own status and powers and to object to new burdens on teachers and other employees. Opposition from such groups is always a problem, but it doesn't always spell defeat.

Smart superintendents would not want unions against them very often. But important initiatives are often possible only if the superintendent can build broader civic coalitions, including city government, businesses, and foundations that can reduce the dominance of these groups, leading them to make compromises.

Unions also are willing to consider changes that benefit their members, and not just financial changes. In New York City, Joel Klein was able to negotiate changes in the teacher contract that allowed schools to ignore seniority in filling vacancies—the union and individual teachers valued traditional protections for senior teachers, but they valued collegial working relationships even more. Though Klein and the United Federation of Teachers continued to clash on many issues, this agreement persisted. In similar fashion, Springfield (Massachusetts) Public Schools was able to find common cause with the local teachers union in a turnaround plan that emphasized enhanced autonomy for schools and higher expectations for staff. The agreement, ratified by more than 90 percent of teachers, offered principals significant staffing flexibility in exchange for allowing teacher-led teams to bargain over working conditions at the site level.[5]

Superintendents also must know where the possible fissures in such groups are, and whether some segments of their memberships might become their allies in particular matters. Denver superintendents Michael Bennet and Tom Boasberg succeeded many times in making common cause with key union factions and gaining countervailing community support. Bennet's first such success came when he convinced some union leaders that the district would continue to lose enrollment (and thus teacher jobs) unless the district could do a better job identifying and keeping the highest-performing teachers. Another vital early success came when the leaders of a growing Hispanic neighborhood joined Bennet in demanding closure and replacement of schools that were not staffed to serve English language learner students. Unions chose not to oppose these actions because of the coalition behind them; had Bennet acted alone, their reaction would have been negative. (Later sections of this paper will show how Denver superintendents have frequently outflanked the teachers union by gaining the support of key civic groups).

Teachers and principals. The players are different when superintendents try to influence the actions of teachers and principals, but the dynamics are similar. Though superintendents can't bargain individually with every teacher and principal, they can gain a great deal of support by making promises (about stabilizing the rules under which schools work, increasing schools' control of their time and money, and allowing schools to choose how to fill teacher vacancies, for example) and holding schools accountable for student learning rather than rule compliance.

Such tacit bargaining can build enthusiasm and loyalty at the school level. But superintendents must overcome suspicions that promises of freedom are just for show by backing schools up when they come into conflict with central office units. As Cleveland Superintendent Eric Gordon discovered, promises to schools mean little if they clash with central office routines or the beliefs of key administrators (see inset, *Resetting the Central Office*, on previous page). To build support at the school level, superintendents must use their formal powers to make sure schools get the promised freedom and support.

Traditionally, superintendents have tried to influence school staff by mandating certain practices and then offering related professional development. In essence, they have told people what to do, and by offering training undermined capacity-based excuses. This approach can generate compliance but not consent: teachers and principals take action, but without conviction or commitment. Superintendents who want to make real changes must treat school staff as professionals who respond better to fair bargains than coercion.

The next section discusses the importance of building external constituencies, which can be indispensable in light of likely intransigent opposition from at least factions of the school board, central office, and teachers union. In doing so, superintendents must demonstrate the need for change and improvement—points that educators, unions, and the school board can misunderstand. A superintendent can't speak out of both sides of his mouth. He must deliver a consistent message to both internal and external constituencies. In talking to insiders, however, the superintendent can emphasize the improvements already made and how their strategy can benefit teachers and principals by enhancing professional freedom, career ladders, and access to desired supports.

Bargaining and Building Coalitions Outside the District

No savvy superintendent expects change to be easy or fast. To change a district and schools enough to make a major difference in results, superintendents need help overcoming the inertia of the central office and sustained support from the school board. They also might need unrestricted funds from new sources or help changing state laws that rule out good educational practice or prevent needed adjustments in district policy. No matter how inspiring and virtuous they are, superintendents can't accomplish these things by themselves. They need support from powerful elements of the civic community and the state that normally stay on the sidelines.[6]

Potential allies can include business and cultural institutions, the mayor and leaders of key city offices, the governor or chief state school officer, philanthropies, nonprofits that support youth and families, and parents who are severely underserved or left for private schools. To build external political support, superintendents must hold frank conversations with leaders outside the education system about data—local elementary test scores, graduation and college-going rates, youth unemployment—pointing out the need for school improvement initiatives and leading conversations about what is possible. Once motivated, potential allies must be recruited to support a strategy that the superintendent can persuasively argue will benefit both children and the entire city.

Making Common Cause with Rivals

In some cities, superintendents must decide whether to keep charter schools at arm's length or make common cause on certain issues through alliances—practical arrangements of mutual interest, not unconditional friendships—with charter school operators. The political risks and benefits of these arrangements for superintendents depend in part on how the sector is perceived by other stakeholder groups, including board members.

As a recent CRPE study of charter-district collaboration in 35 cities found, collaboration has taken many forms, including systems to improve special education services for students or information for families, peer learning networks, colocations of charter and district schools, shared central services, more equitable funding formulas, and joint advocacy efforts.[7]

Tensions remain, but these partnerships also have resulted in significant policy "wins" for students and families, including replacing chronically struggling neighborhood schools with high-performing charter schools, citywide unified enrollment systems to address some of the burdens of choice, more equitable and transparent discipline practices in both sectors, coordinated cost-sharing systems to provide students with special needs greater access to choice and innovative practices, and common accountability tools that allow families as well as district and charter administrators to track school performance across a city regardless of who governs that school.

These collaborations can improve relationships between the superintendent and private funders that had previously supported only charter schools. They also can introduce liabilities, as when a board majority or members of the public seek to undermine the superintendent by virtue of the affiliation. Managing any fallout from partnerships with charter schools requires superintendents to affirmatively build the case for the benefits of collaboration for families and students and to be transparent about the results of such initiatives.

Mass appeals. Superintendents understandably hope that mass meetings where all stakeholders are heard will lead to a harmonic convergence where all parties see their common bonds and agree on a universally popular line of action. But it doesn't work that way. Some stakeholders may have a lot to lose. Others might not be happy with the schools but do not want to criticize or support action that satisfied stakeholders would oppose. (Owners of retail chains, for example, have heard that in some cities teacher unions have led boycotts.) Mass events can lead to agreement on generalities and moral sentiments, not definite lines of action.

Challenges for Superintendents New to a City

Though some effective superintendents have come from cities other than the one in which they now work, "coming from here" or "coming back here" is a clear advantage. A person who knows the city's history and politics, as well as how to make alliances with potentially powerful groups like faith, business, and higher education leaders, has an important advantage. Superintendents who are new to a city can succeed, but they must work hard to learn and seek advice from senior civic leaders. As we have suggested elsewhere, these superintendents should look for mentors in the civic and business communities who can help them understand "where the bodies are buried" in local politics, build relationships with indispensable supporters, and avoid hidden traps.[8]

Good advice on coalition-forming may come from elected officials and senior civic actors who have indicated eagerness to see the district improve dramatically. Smart superintendents pick allies carefully, however. Not all elected officials will favor actions that change schools or create new options for families. Officials with citywide constituencies will, on average, be more open to actions that change school leadership or enrollment patterns than those representing smaller geographic areas, such as city council or state House members.

Partnerships also can be forged between local insiders and instructional experts from out of town. When Alan Bersin, a former Justice Department attorney with political experience in San Diego became superintendent of that city's schools, he hired renowned New York City educator Anthony Alvarado as his deputy. Bersin gave Alvarado free rein to implement his comprehensive instructional improvement strategy, while Bersin built support and looked out for opposition. The partnership was highly effective for five years, leading to meaningful improvements in elementary school results. However, Alvarado's insistence that all high schools follow the same approach to instruction and his abrasive response to dissent created a political upheaval that even Bersin could not withstand.[9] Ultimately, a new union-friendly school board fired Bersin and put an end to the initiative. A less autocratic and more gradual approach to implementation might have avoided the backlash and preserved reforms. The lesson is that such a partnership has promise, but only if the political and instructional partners jointly calculate risks and work to avoid unnecessary confrontations.

Civic leaders. To build a coalition in favor of a strong reform initiative, there is no alternative to face-to face meetings with key civic leaders, in which the superintendent makes a case for change, lays out strategy, and asks for help. Not all civic leaders approached in this way will join the coalition, but while the superintendent needs to gather support, he doesn't need unanimity. If after a period of quiet diplomacy, a plausible group of leaders from several sectors agree to work together and provide public support—and in some cases, financing for further outreach—the superintendent can declare that he has a mandate.

Superintendents should reach out early to elected officials and civic groups with a record of getting things done (downtown redevelopment, for example). In some cases, mayors and other civic leaders may have been waiting impatiently for an opportunity to support school improvement. But those actors have other agendas, and in some cities superintendents must build support elsewhere before the mayor or the peak civic organization decides to come on board. Some mayors might be indifferent about education or unwilling to rock the boat.[10] But many appreciate local agency heads who accomplish the unexpected, solve problems, and work across institutional lines. They might be persuaded to support actions they hadn't previously contemplated. In such cases, even if the mayor takes the public credit, the superintendent's stature and professional reputation will grow.

Even in localities where the civic elite has despaired of working effectively with the district, knowledgeable community and business leaders might work with the superintendent to arrange visits to places like Cleveland, Denver, New Orleans, and Washington, D.C., where potential allies can see that once-inert school systems have changed in response to local initiative.

Insider-outsider coalitions. Superintendents also must assess all their allies, knowing what issues are central to them and what they are willing to do as part of a coalition. Superintendents who have built coalitions to support important initiatives have told us that few of their allies cared equally about everything in a reform strategy. For example, business, higher education, and teachers might all support an initiative to strengthen math and science education, but each for different reasons.

A superintendent pulling together such a coalition must know what provisions each ally cares about the most, what else they will stand up for to keep faith with others, and what might drive them to withdraw. Some allies are also uniquely positioned to provide particular kinds of help. When Michelle Rhee was new in the D.C. superintendency, she asked the local bar association for a person to serve as the district's general counsel, arguing that the existing lawyers were too risk averse.

A Broad Civic Coalition

In Camden, New Jersey, Superintendent Paymon Rouhanifard was appointed as part of a state takeover. Under those circumstances, some superintendents would have acted boldly without much concern for local sensitivities. But mindful of the polarized politics in nearby Newark and New York City, Rouhanifard carefully built a centrist coalition of civic, business, religious, and neighborhood leaders along with traditional political "kingmakers." He pressed everyone to admit that the schools had to improve dramatically, which could not happen without major changes. He listened to local leaders' attachment to neighborhood schools and reluctance to have all schools turned over charter operators, but he also made sure to include parents and supporters of the few but high-performing charter schools in the city. After a period of cultivation, he was able to announce a two-sided initiative to improve the most promising district-run schools while increasing the numbers of charter schools run by quality providers. Not all members of the coalition Rouhanifard built are equally excited about all parts of his plan, but all accept that its two-sided nature is necessary and more likely to survive politically and succeed educationally than any feasible alternative.

Less experienced superintendents might think that issues of general import—inequities, inefficiencies, and the city's economic stability—are what will bind coalitions. But most soon learn that an initiative in the broad public interest can succeed only if it draws support from groups that care only about particular parts.

General government. By formulating coalitions around new ideas for workforce development and job creation, superintendents and their fellow city agency heads have gained new leverage, often bypassing political blockages that had kept each in check. Superintendents also might make common cause on some issues with local economic development authorities or higher education institutions. When such collaborations are undertaken to show movement without upsetting the central office, unions, or single-issue parent groups, they only hide the fact that the schools aren't changing. But when crafted to require changes in K–12 schools, citywide collaborations can justify higher teaching and graduation standards, more rigorous programs, and new options for families.

For example, the school board and teachers union might oppose proposals to bring career scientists, engineers, and mathematicians into full-time teaching roles through alternative pipelines. But higher education and the business community could join a superintendent-led coalition based on their desire for better prepared graduates, helping overcome opposition and accomplish something considered impossible.

As one former superintendent said, "The education reform debate—charters, Common Core, labor-management fights—had become stale. A broader focus and new allies let us act on behalf of kids again."

Countervailing Union Opposition

Coalitions with forces outside the district structure can have the added advantage of buffering the superintendent from teachers union opposition. Tom Boasberg in Denver has survived repeated union efforts to elect school board majorities that would fire him. Support from businesses, foundations, minority leaders, and the mayor have been enough to sustain and eventually expand majority board support in favor of Boasberg's reform agenda.

Foundations. Superintendents can also tap potential sources of support outside the city or county. As a source of funding and validation, national foundations can be a resource if employed carefully. A foundation that has committed to a school improvement strategy (small schools, leadership development, personalized learning, for example) can allow superintendents to mount initiatives more quickly and on a larger scale than would be possible with district money alone. The superintendent also can plausibly claim outside support for what is happening locally. These real advantages, however, can turn into problems if foundation-supported initiatives distort district priorities—for example, lead the superintendent to sideline an important activity that doesn't have foundation funding—or generate local opposition.

We have written before about how foundation support proved a mixed blessing to Oakland Superintendent Randy Ward.[11] Attracted by his bold reform plan, several national foundations offered money to build new districtwide programs or central office capacities. Ultimately the new programs and capacities undermined Ward's autonomy-accountability reform strategy by diverting district money and leadership energy away from it.

Schools and children don't benefit if district leaders randomly pursue grants just to get the money. Foundation grants can also come with their own political liabilities: In recent years, teachers union opposition has stymied foundation-supported initiatives on teacher effectiveness measurement and performance incentives.

Denver is an example of a district that has attracted foundation funding that supports, rather than distorts, its own reform priorities. Superintendents Bennet and Boasberg have stated their priorities in ways that generated foundation support while generally avoiding grants that divert energy from their main reform strategy. Leaders who cannot persuade national foundations to support their reform strategies might be tempted to skim a little money for their own purposes while keeping promises to the funders. This can threaten a local reform strategy, first by diverting effort and second by confusing local allies about what the superintendent considers important. Leaders in such situations must look to local sources, including business and philanthropy, and to imaginative use of existing state and federal grants.

State government. Often overlooked as potential allies, sources of funding, and validation, state officials are extremely eager to see urban schools improve and local superintendents taking initiative. Superintendents and state chiefs we interviewed discussed how state agencies and sometimes even governors can help with everything from clearing state regulatory impediments to repurposing state and federal grants and

sponsoring legislation enabling local initiatives. Because many important changes—portfolio strategies, school-based control of budget and staffing, family choice, performance-based decisions about school continuation, and charter schools—depend on favorable state laws, a superintendent should speak clearly and ambitiously for the district when it needs new authority or clarification, whether from the legislature, governor, or state superintendent.

Superintendents must bargain with the state chief, the governor, legislators, and on occasion with lower-level state education agency staff. These officials must understand how a given action will help them, and superintendents must know enough about those parties' interests to formulate proposals that will attract them. We heard many times that superintendents also need to build relationships with the state legislators who represent their city. Effective superintendents visit the state capitol, learn what matters to individual legislators, educate them on issues, and suggest links to measures that they want to push.

State chiefs we interviewed also said they can help in ways some superintendents don't understand through their control of discretionary state grant programs and their ability to act in support of local initiatives. Of course, some chiefs might prove too cautious to be helpful. But a superintendent should spend time with the chief and talk candidly about what needs to be done and where he needs money and political support. Our respondents all said that it's easy to see whether a chief is going to be creative or resort to bureaucratic evasion.

In Louisiana, a local superintendent collaborated with the state chief to gain approval for actions the local board would, if left to its own devices, have blocked. A national technology company wanted to locate a facility in a small city, and local leaders definitely wanted the jobs and cash flow that it would bring. However, the company's concern about the quality of local schools became a sticking point until the state chief guaranteed that several new charter schools could be started locally.

In many states, chiefs have new takeover powers, which can, contrary to intuition, be used to a local superintendent's advantage. Politically savvy superintendents understand that an external threat from the state to take over the district or a set of its schools creates an opportunity for bold local action and helps overcome resistance. In rolling out an ambitious reform plan that included school closings, Atlanta Superintendent Meria Carstarphen told her school board and district leaders, "We can either take action or lose control."[12] Superintendents are naturally tempted to oppose state takeover actions, but they should think twice—or more like a dozen times—about accepting the possibility and leading an effort to make state action unnecessary.

Putting It All on the Line

In Cleveland, Superintendent Eric Gordon turned the city's history of education levy failures into a bargaining advantage. The district's adoption of the highly ambitious Cleveland Plan led voters to approve a local levy for the first time in more than a decade, but Gordon struck a strong note of caution: "If we don't come through, the voters will turn our levy down the next time. We can't just presume voter support, we have to earn it." He even published a doomsday clock showing how much time remained before the next levy election. The resulting sense of urgency helped drive change in a sometimes-resistant district and teaching force, and kept the strong support of Cleveland's popular mayor, Frank Jackson. In 2016, Cleveland voters approved another levy, further strengthening Gordon's hand.

Federal government. Finally, superintendents in the largest cities can also make common cause with the U.S. Secretary of Education and other federal officials. Collaboration can be positive, such as through grants or experimental uses of federal categorical funds, or negative, based on federal criticism amplifying the city's lack of progress or neglect of disadvantaged groups. As one storied local education leader told us, "[Former Education Secretary] William Bennett did a giant favor to Chicago when he went there and said its schools were the worst in the country. That brought the whole city together and broke a lot of logjams. I wish the Secretary would come to my city and say the same things—as long as he also offered to give us a lot of flexibility on the use of Title I funds."

Developing new coalitions takes time and sustained attention. That's where superintendents prove their tenacity—putting in the time, tending the new alliances, living with the risks and criticism, and working at proposals until they can pass. In time, they develop a professional reputation that in itself can help drive change.

Cultivating—and Using—Professional Reputation

Willingness to fight for what one wants and win against opposition are key elements of professional reputation. Superintendents must be regarded as determined, resourceful, and difficult to keep down. Superintendents, like presidents, don't gain a professional reputation for only doing what's easy, and they gain the most by succeeding when it looked like they would fail. Wins that build professional reputation take time and almost always involve recovering from setbacks.

To build a personal reputation for effectiveness, a superintendent must have goals—strong and specific desires to build something new or change the status quo. A person with goals will always be in tension with somebody, and must therefore work to build support for particular actions. The superintendent needs to say what they want to accomplish and how. Some local leaders are tempted to hide their hands, fearing that critics will organize against them. That might be necessary when a superintendent is new in the job and needs time for the quiet sounding-out of potential allies described above. But there is no escaping the fact that no one can mobilize support for an initiative unless they describe and explain it. Support for the superintendent as an individual is transitory. Lasting support must attach to a strategy that people believe addresses a real problem they can understand and think will work.

Superintendents must decide what they will be held accountable for, and therefore shouldn't set goals that are wildly inconsistent with reality. They also must assess both likely sources of support and opposition, and how they might make allies of individuals and groups that are on the fence or simply not engaged.

Some superintendents consider making preemptive concessions or giving gifts to powerful interest groups—most frequently wage increases to teachers—as an opening move. Neustadt's analysis and the negative experience of leaders who have made such moves suggest that superintendents should make such benefits contingent on specific actions by the other party. Once a group (a union, for example) has a benefit in hand, they have no reason to compensate the superintendent retroactively. In general, superintendents build their reputations through forthright negotiation, not sacrificial offerings.

On some topics, success can only come after failures. Proposing an important reform is the first step in a journey of a thousand miles. Superintendents with big ideas often must talk about them in many different forums and refuse to be discouraged by initial indifference, even from the school board. They must also wait to force action until the time is right—as events dramatize the need, opponents are discredited, or dedicated opponents leave the board.

Turnover and Timing

Rapid turnover in the superintendency works against building or making use of professional reputation. Frederick Hess has written persuasively about how board instability and limited superintendent terms—often three years or less—prevent consistent execution of any reform strategy. Some superintendents have adapted by building their own personal brands, knowing that as they are fired from one district another will be looking for someone with a national reputation. However, in all our studies of city-level reform, leadership continuity leaps out as a key success factor. Superintendents must act as if they intend to stay a long time, proposing a coherent reform strategy and working to advance it at every opportunity while timing key actions to avoid all-or-nothing confrontations. This involves frank conversations with the school board and community and serious efforts to develop local bases of support which can sustain reforms long after superintendents make their next leap. It also requires working with opponents, pressing forward while doing everything possible to accommodate their concerns.

Other than being personally resilient, how does a superintendent build a professional reputation for overcoming obstacles and defeats? Based on his examination of the presidency, Neustadt would suggest four ways:

- Continually building up a coalition in favor of an action that can't win the first time it is proposed.
- Being such a good ally that others want to be on your side.
- Creating new allies by mentoring and developing the careers of others.
- Developing and conspicuously exercising your own skills.

Assembling support over time. Big changes take time. Superintendents who see the need for bold new initiatives or major transformations of the teaching force can't expect to succeed immediately. Like presidents, they will put an idea on the table, expect some hard knocks, but work to build a winning coalition over time.

Accomplishing something difficult almost always involves finding or energizing new allies. The status quo with respect to any issue exists for two reasons: first, because some important interests support it, and second, because other groups that might benefit from different arrangements have acquiesced.

Creating allies. Personal contacts and repeated conversations are indispensable in building and keeping allies. Skillful superintendents identify potential allies, get to know them personally in face-to-face meetings, and then maintain and build relationships over time via occasional phone calls, updates, and questions. "I am thinking about a new strategy for addressing *X* problem, and wanted to know what you think of it and whether you have any ideas about how to make it work," is a way to keep an ally once made, and to know who might help in a particular situation.

Superintendents prepare to win at the long game of slowly building support for important actions by creating allies inside the school system through mentoring. Many superintendents we interviewed take pains to identify, support, and mentor competent and ambitious teachers and principals. A few superintendents have mentored one-on-one, but most have established cohort groups of mentees who meet and discuss issues and tactics, or planned shadowing arrangements whereby less experienced mentees work with more accomplished district and school leaders.

Though mentor superintendents are relatively rare, some have had outstanding results. Perhaps the most vivid example comes from New York City, where its former chancellor Joel Klein mentored at least six people who became big-city superintendents (Chris Cerf, John White, Andres Alonso, Garth Harries, Cami Anderson, and Paymon Rouhanifard). Chiefs for Change also encourages current and former superintendents to mentor aspiring ones.

Superintendents who groom successors and leaders for other places can have influence after they leave office. Like presidents, superintendents are unlikely to achieve all their most important goals within their own term, even if it is a long one. Though it's not always possible to hand the job directly to the best-prepared person, superintendents can influence the more distant future by populating the candidate pool with their mentees.

Building and demonstrating skill. There is a reason why it took prominent lawyers and political figures to lead the first cities that adopted the portfolio strategy. The job of transforming a large urban education system requires a combination of political strategy, understanding of how government works, and ability to move a stagnant organization, mixed with respect and appreciation for hardworking school leaders and teachers. To initiate something as bold and with as many political and operational challenges as the portfolio strategy, it took extremely skilled and preternaturally self-confident individuals who had strong links to mayors, governors, "city fathers," and powerful philanthropies.

Succeeding Someone Who Acted Too Boldly

Occasionally, a superintendent will succeed someone who understood what needed to be done but pushed too hard and created a political backlash. The new superintendent might want to pursue a similar strategy but must create distance from the predecessor. (Two very successful superintendents, Kaya Henderson, who succeeded Michelle Rhee in the District of Columbia, and Chris Cerf, who succeeded Cami Anderson in Newark, have found themselves in this position.)

In this situation, new superintendents must avoid pledging not to follow any of their predecessors' policies. But they can, both in word and action, signal a new eagerness to engage aggrieved groups and avoid precipitate action. Henderson and Cerf met with their predecessors' critics and listened to grievances. But they also elicited statements that the current state of the schools was unacceptable, and that adults owed it to the city's children to try new remedies and abandon failures. They both found powerful allies who had been aggrieved by the earlier superintendent's style but agreed that some actions (aggressive search for new talent, new schools in the poorest neighborhoods, for example) were necessary and acceptable if introduced more gradually and with fuller explanation. In Newark, Cerf was able to bring the mayor, himself an educator, back into the reform movement as an advocate of a balanced strategy of both introducing charter schools and reforming the district.

No matter how delicately they proceed, new superintendents will still upset some groups. But they, like leaders in cities that have experienced less strife, must accept opposition and seek a strong pro-reform coalition, not universal consensus.

Many of the actions described above require judgment and personal touch: superintendents who build their professional reputations by being persistent and imaginative in pursuing their goals must also be able to assess situations, anticipate others' reactions, manage conflict, and deal smoothly with people. Thus, tenacity and skill, though conceptually different, are often found together in practice.

There are, however, some aspects of skill not touched on above. Superintendents must understand the interests of others well enough to frame plausible appeals and offer workable bargains. They also must know their potential opponents well enough to take actions that might divide them. No superintendent can be in office long without knowing what will draw opposition from unions and school board members. They can also assume that families whose schools are considered the best in the district will be suspicious of any changes in programs, funding, and staffing. It takes more skill and effort, however, to know where key groups' internal divisions are, distinguish between bluffs and earnest threats of action, and understand what trades they will consider.

Superintendents must also pay attention to the agendas of new school board members, whether in general or for particular groups. Superintendents must be alert to the possibilities for innovation at such times and look for ways to structure the thinking of receptive board members.

Finally, superintendents must make sure others keep bargains they have agreed to. Some bargaining partners will backslide; superintendents must take that behavior into account in future bargaining over grants or other benefits they control.

The remainder of this section explores four ways superintendents can build and demonstrate skill: controlling subordinates, controlling their own time, using their personal prestige, and consistent communication.

Turning nominal subordinates into allies. If anything important is to happen in the schools, the district central office also must change, in both positive and negative ways. The central office must be positively committed to implementation of the idea, and it must be prevented from delaying or weakening it to protect established ways of doing business. The superintendent must lead and cause these changes, often against strong bureaucratic resistance.

As one former superintendent recalled, "Your bureaucrats might be good at their jobs, but they can trap you because they have tunnel vision and are always searching for constraints. Finding reasons why something can't be done is their basis of influence, but you don't want to be captured."

When, as is often the case, a superintendent's reform strategy is to develop innovative schools and offer new choices for families, the central office must fully support creating a level playing field for all schools. These changes require building some central office capacities and abandoning others. Because central office staff hired when the district's strategy was "command and control" are unlikely to either support or understand such changes, the superintendent must lead and enforce organizational transformation. Doing so involves communicating professional expectations for staff and clearly articulating goals and benchmarks for implementation.

Experienced superintendents report using three types of skills in dealing with subordinate staff. First, they communicate explicitly and often, not expecting staff members to automatically understand their goals. Second, they identify incumbent staff members who show real interest in the superintendent's priorities and find ways to use their skills through special assignments, promotions, etc. Third, they pay attention to staff statements and actions in public, and deal directly with any clear cases of sabotage.

When using the third skill with tenured staff, this can involve meetings, reprimands, and memos for the record. With other staff, it can involve second chances and ultimately termination. This last option has a cost—lost skills and possible opposition from the external groups with whom the errant staff member is connected—but it also is highly effective and needn't be used often. As one experienced local leader told us, "Firing many people hurts families and neighborhoods. People have more friendships and family links than

you would imagine, at least until they all start coming after you. On the other hand, if you never fire anyone, people will start to think you never will."

Successfully shifting entrenched bureaucratic systems often requires bringing on new leadership. Superintendents can typically make only a few new appointments to top staff positions. Experienced superintendents hire people whose main motivation is to help extend influence. If a potential staff member is an admired educator or known to key groups, all the better. But Joel Klein in New York City demonstrated the value of hiring professional staff, such as a former White House Fellow who knew education issues but was dedicated to advancing the superintendent's priorities.

A final word of wisdom from experienced superintendents: Be extremely careful about making an appointment if its only purpose is to appease a particular group. As one warned, "One thing you know about such a person is that he or she will never really work for you."

Controlling the superintendent's own time. Many superintendents, especially those from the largest districts, report that they could spend every waking minute visiting schools and in regularly scheduled meetings with the school board and teachers union. These activities are important; no superintendent can be both influential and reclusive. But superintendents must guard time for their own initiatives to formulate ideas and to get to know other key leaders in their city.

Finding the necessary time can be difficult, as groups accustomed to frequent meetings will complain.[13] However, as one superintendent told us, "Spending all your time in mandatory meetings prevents your doing anything … which is exactly why [those groups] want to dominate your time." Superintendents, like presidents, must control their calendar, often via a gatekeeper who protects blocks of time the superintendent has set aside for his own initiatives.

Like any executive, the superintendent's use of time signals their priorities. Superintendents committed to visiting every school each year can accomplish some things, but they must give up on spending a lot of time with other senior officials and constituencies. The same is true of superintendents who feel they must meet with interest groups every few weeks. There is no single right way for a superintendent to use time, but extreme commitments to one activity push out others.

However, all superintendents must set priorities and emphasize relationships with schools and educators that stand out for some reason—their problems are the most egregious, local politics are most ripe for change, or many other schools will be affected by their example. As another former superintendent said, "There is no clearer way to communicate your priorities than to be obviously willing to say yes and no" to demands for time.

Using personal prestige. When it comes to turning prestige into power, superintendents are not in the same ballpark as presidents. A few former big-city superintendents like Denver's Michael Bennet, now a U.S. Senator, D.C.'s Michelle Rhee and Kaya Henderson, Newark's Chris Cerf, and Paul Vallas, who had stints in Chicago, New York City, and Philadelphia, have public images and some followings from their earlier lives. These can translate to an unusual, but at most moderate, degree of prestige-derived influence in their current jobs. Still, even previously obscure superintendents can make arguments in public and try to educate citizens about issues under their purview, such as the links between spending and school quality, the desirability of standards, testing, charter schools, etc.

To maximize influence via prestige, superintendents should seek to have a public image and to be identified as the person leading the fight for some goal (standards, accountability, innovation, for example). And of course, they should avoid negative publicity based on their personal behavior.

Consistent communication. Any superintendent can create a leadership image through communication. But the superintendent cannot sing a different tune every month and must say no to off-message actions that can distract from the central task.

The superintendent needs an elevator speech, like the one below specific to the portfolio strategy, adapted for their particular strategy, city, and audience.

> ***Too many children are being left behind in our public schools. I am determined to change this so every family has at least one, and preferably more, choice of schools that work well for their children. We need to support our best schools, improve schools that are almost good enough, and replace our weakest schools with new, better options. This city needs to be a place where the best teachers and principals want to work and all families have confidence in our schools.***

Of course, the superintendent must be prepared to explain the strategy and the need for it in greater detail than an elevator speech allows. A superintendent must know his audience and be able to effectively tailor the message to a wide range of stakeholders. The school board, mayor, governor's staff, and key local civic groups like the chamber of commerce will need to know why the city must pursue a bold new strategy that discards the status quo. (And supporters must occasionally be reminded, especially when problems occur.) The superintendent can best do this by providing a frank assessment of the district's existing ability to improve results for disadvantaged students and framing the need for a bold new strategy within these points:

- What is the core idea of the strategy? How is it different from things that have been tried before? Why is it a good idea for this city?
- How will the changes benefit families?
- How will this make the city a rewarding environment (and magnet) for talented educators?
- What will it mean for use of public funds?
- What will it mean for philanthropy (how will the city tap philanthropic groups to help with significant one-time costs)?
- How will it all start? What does the next 12 to 18 months look like?
- How will success be evaluated and communicated?

Superintendents who have been career educators might consider themselves novices in public communication. Though such skills are in part innate, they are also learnable. Lawyers are trained to assess their own bargaining advantages and those of their opponents. Business leaders are taught how to control subordinates and to guard time for their own initiatives. Superintendents might not be born with these skills, but they can learn them.

Making Decisions to Maximize Power

Superintendents who work hard on goals, tenacity, professional reputation, and communication are likely to have a great deal of power. Does Neustadt's exhortation for a president to always "see his power stakes" add anything to what has been discussed above? The answer is yes, a little. Neustadt urges presidents to consider the future implications of decisions and not to delegate thinking about their stakes to anyone else. His exhortation has some obvious implications, including:

Don't make decisions that:

- shock, disillusion, or undermine your allies
- exhaust your credit so that you can only be a caretaker in the future
- are likely to be overturned quickly by the legislature or courts
- assume that other officials will take positions that can lose them their jobs
- are likely to get you fired
- give mixed signals to your subordinates

Do make decisions that:

- leave your allies wanting to work with you again
- lead incrementally to a string of successes that you can sustain with future decisions
- are likely to be sustained if challenged in court or the legislature (thus further weakening opponents)
- share credit and build up the support bases of others with whom you want to work in the future
- buttress support for the mayor or whomever appoints you
- make it clear what your subordinates should do

Obvious though these exhortations are, some superintendents, like presidents, run afoul of them. Some gain a reputation for agreeing with the last person to see them, or for making agreements one day and acting unpredictably the next. Others move from one initiative to another and forget to bring their supporters along. As one veteran superintendent said, "People won't follow somebody who comes up with a new reform idea every month, or who acts as if everyone is obligated to follow wherever they lead."

But some superintendents carefully assemble coalitions in support of more equitable student-based funding systems, build consensus on behalf of higher standards, and incrementally build support for experiments on school autonomy and collaboration with charter schools. In such cases, superintendents were in stronger positions after decisions were made than before. These superintendents built power by keeping coalitions together and came back from setbacks each time better prepared than the last.

Beyond these generalities, superintendents must see any decision as one in a continuing series, and when blocked in one area of policy, continue improving their positions by succeeding in another. Some superintendents determined to transform consistently low-performing schools have found one neighborhood responsive and others intractable. They focused on the first and deferred the second, expecting that success in one neighborhood could open up new possibilities in others.

Finally, local coalitions built to support the launch of an important reform must endure. Cities whose strategies are nearly a decade old can still be divided about the desirability of particular elements. Though over time new sources of support appear—from parents who have benefited from new options, school leaders who enjoy more freedom or support, and nonprofit organizations that have found new purpose—survival

continues to depend on a broad coalition of groups that care about the overall health of the city. Because these groups are not inclined to focus solely on education, the superintendent must work continuously to ensure continued, informed support.

Much the same is true of actions toward transformation, closure, or replacement of low-performing schools. To preserve their own effectiveness, superintendents must judge when to simply identify needs and problems, when to quietly build support with city and neighborhood leaders, and when to take definitive action.

Superintendents who follow these principles—strategically delaying action in one area while pursuing another, aggressively pushing that idea only after they have gathered a potentially winning coalition—are sure to be criticized by single-issue groups for being too cautious, or worse. Superintendents must be forthright about why they are acting in some areas and building toward action in others.

Conclusion

This paper is a starting point for those who strive to make superintendents more effective. The authors' thinking about education reform, accountability, school choice, and other topics are well known, but the ideas we present are neutral. Superintendents must think about power and influence, no matter what direction they hope to lead.

Circumstances in individual cities will define superintendents' problems and opportunities. Superintendents in cities with small numbers of schools will have options that those who oversee hundreds of schools won't. Mayor-appointed superintendents will have potential allies that others don't, but also potentially fickle bosses; they, like other superintendents, must build other sources of support to increase survivability. New superintendents with initially strong board support still must build coalitions to reduce their vulnerability to a shift in board sentiment. Regardless of their mode of appointment or degree of personal prestige, all superintendents face the common problem of building freedom of action and finding leverage in their limited formal authorities.

We wrote this paper as a resource for those who are preparing themselves for the superintendent's job and for groups offering pre-service training. It is hard to prepare for a role that is not well understood. Our hope is that this paper will help attract and prepare people from inside and outside education who want to do all of the superintendent's job, not just a familiar part of it.

Local politics and the means of superintendent selection will determine how far a particular superintendent can take these ideas. However, our final message is that any superintendent who says, "This political stuff is not for me," accepts unnecessary limits to their ability to improve education and serve children.

Endnotes

1. Among past research of note: Paul Hill, Christine Campbell, and Betheny Gross, *Strife and Progress: Portfolio Strategies for Managing Urban Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2012); Paul Hill and Josephine Bonan, *Decentralization and Accountability in Public Education* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation Publication Series, 1991); Paul Hill, Arthur E. Wise, and Leslie Shapiro, *Educational Progress: Cities Mobilize to Improve Their Schools* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1989).

2. Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power* (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 1960); Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents, the Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1990). A more recent book builds on Neustadt's ideas but focuses on ways in which limitations in governmental capacity, and modern presidents' ignorance of these limits, has discredited recent administrations. An electoral system that favors celebrity outsiders has, the author claims, weakened the presidency, which can be restored to its full strength only if chief executives pay close attention to agencies' capacities and get advance warning of failures. See Elaine Kamarck, *How Presidents Fail and How They Can Succeed Again* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2016).

3. In an earlier analysis for chief state school officers, we explained Neustadt's framework in much greater detail. See Paul Hill and Ashley Jochim, *The Power of Persuasion: A Model for Effective Political Leadership by State Chiefs* (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2017).

4. Paul Hill and Ashley Jochim, *A Democratic Constitution for Public Education* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), Chapter 4.

5. Josh Kenworthy, "How did Lawrence, Mass., turn its schools around? Cooperation." *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 26, 2017.

6. For more on why and how a reform leader must increase the number and diversity of groups engaged in local education politics, see Paul Hill and Ashley Jochim, "Street-Savvy School Reform," *Education Next*, Aug. 9, 2016.

7. Robin Lake, et al., *Bridging the District-Charter Divide to Help More Students Succeed* (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2017).

8. Paul Hill and James Harvey, eds., *Making School Reform Work: New Partnerships for Real Change* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994).

9. Richard Lee Colvin, *Tilting at Windmills: School Reform, San Diego, and America's Race to Renew Public Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

10. For mayor-appointed superintendents, this relationship can be a double-edged sword: positive if the mayor expects to get credit for the superintendent's action, negative if the mayor threatens to fire the superintendent unless he takes a particular action.

11. Paul Hill and Kacey Guin, *What Others Can Learn From Oakland's School Reform Initiative* (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2007, available from the authors).

12. Maureen Downey, "APS school chief: Can't change schools without changing culture," Atlanta Journal-Constitution, March 31, 2016.

13. Neustadt discusses President Eisenhower's unprecedented decision not to allow Cabinet members to meet with him whenever they wanted. He and future presidents also let staff members accumulate meeting requests until it was possible to pull together groups that had similar concerns. These changes were not welcome, but once made they were accepted.

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