

What Matters Most in Superintendent Evaluation

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In the fall of 2018, all school superintendents in a state in the southwest were invited to take part in a survey which included a section related to superintendent perceptions of the board's evaluation process for superintendents. The present article addresses the factors perceived to be important in evaluations of superintendents by governing board members. The survey revealed the most important factors in governing board evaluations of the superintendent, as perceived by superintendents. The survey also revealed that superintendents perceive high levels of trust in their relationships with board members. The results indicate that the most important factors in board evaluations of the superintendent include management of the financial affairs of the district, maintaining the quality of the education program, relationships with employees, developing and implementing long term plans for the district, student performance measured by state-mandated assessments, and maintaining a safe environment for students.

Superintendents play a critical role in influencing the culture, policy agenda, strategic decision-making, and overall leadership of their districts. In literature which spans decades regarding the superintendency, various roles have been associated with the position, including teacher-scholar, manager, negotiator-statesman, applied social scientist, and communicator (Cuban, 2001; Hurst, 2017; Kowalski, 2006). Within recent decades, many authors have argued that, given a variety of social, political, and economic factors, the superintendency has evolved into a complex and almost unwieldy position (Bjork & Keedy, 2002; Brunner, 2002; Fusarelli, Cooper, & Carella, 2002; Glasman & Fuller, 2002; Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Kowalski & Glass, 2002; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Papa, English, Davidson, Culver, & Brown, 2013; Parsons, Brandon, Friesen, & Jacobsen, 2019; Petersen & Short, 2001; Tekniepe, 2015; Wells, 2019). The complexities associated with the position have been compounded through factors including social media (Hurst, 2017) and increasing cultural and political polarization (Bowers, 2016).

Literature Review

What We Expect Superintendents to Know and Do

Studying superintendents' leadership has historically posed some challenges to the researcher, in that superintendents might be sometimes concerned about the political consequences of being forthcoming about their perceptions regarding the job (Melton, Reeves, McBrayer, & Smith, 2019). Effective superintendents tend to be very conscious of their public image (Hurst, 2017), and concerns related to one's image could lead to describing one's experiences in ideal rather than actual terms, as well as focusing on areas such as instructional leadership, rather than the actual political and managerial roles that are likely to dominate their time and attention. In the polarized times in which we live, even in the relative safety of a private interview with a researcher, it is reasonable to assume that some superintendents may be more likely to provide politically safe answers to questions about their role when a more controversial response may result in unpleasant political consequences.

While subject to factors such as the political, social, and cultural contexts in which they work, superintendents must find an effective balance between their political, managerial, and instructional selves. The current context of school accountability demands significant and measurable instructional improvements despite overwhelming financial challenges, yet superintendents cannot ignore the political and managerial dimensions of their work. To be effective leaders, superintendents must adequately attend to functions in areas such as human resources, finance and budgeting, maintenance, transportation, food services, public relations, and facilities planning, while also demonstrating the moral authority to lead their districts (Davidson & Hughes, 2020; Fowler, 2019).

We expect superintendents to be all things to all people. They are to be effective managers, ensuring that a school district's financial, accounting, transportation, food services, and technology departments operate capably and smoothly. They are to be savvy politicians, communicating effectively with local taxpayers and with policymakers at the state, local, and national levels to shape legislation so that it will be of benefit to the school district. They are to be instructional leaders who are conversant in a wide range of curricula and instructional strategies.

Conflict Management

A significant role for superintendents in recent decades, it has been argued, also involves managing conflict between various stakeholder groups (Hughes & Davidson, 2020; Melton et al., 2019; Noppe, Yager, Webb, & Sheng, 2013). Issues ranging from school closures to the school calendar to school busing plans can attract significant attention and conflict (McCullough & Leithwood, 2016). Decades ago, Cuban wrote that, “Conflict is the DNA of the superintendency” (1985, p. 28). There is scant evidence that superintendents experience less conflict currently than when these remarks were written, and most superintendents report that they receive little training in managing or mediating conflict (Hughes & Davidson, 2020). Negotiating the conflicts and opposing forces requires a commitment to the acceptance of dissent, as well as constant attention to the many influences and demands of employees, taxpayers, parents, state departments of education, and lawmakers (Melton et al., 2019; Parsons et al., 2019). Wells summarized the challenges superintendents face as follows:

financial challenges, pressures in a day of accountability and high visibility, school board and special interest group pressures, expectations for improved student achievement, litigation, declining enrollment, students with increased social and emotional issues, and expectations for increased job performance. (2019, p. 227)

The public demand for reform of the schools has intensified scrutiny and criticism of the position. The attention on standards and accountability, while not necessarily a new phenomenon, has increased superintendents’ sense of vulnerability. The use of achievement testing as an instrument of accountability, fueled by factors that are economic, political, and social in origin (Davidson, 2015), is a blunt instrument of reform that has unseated many school leaders. Noted Elmore, “Policymakers generally like solutions that are simple and cheap rather than those that are complex and expensive” (2003, p. 6).

Petersen and Fusarelli noted that, “Although superintendents view themselves as professional educators and not politicians, nearly all adopt political strategies in dealing with board members, staff, and the community at large” (2008, p. 117). Necessity dictates that the contemporary superintendent must develop skills in exerting political influence. Conflicts can surface among a wide variety of constituencies including parents, staff, employee organizations, elected officials, taxpayer groups, faith-based groups, advocacy groups, neighborhood associations, and major corporate employers. In order to effectively manage the conflict that is an inevitable fact of life in public schools, superintendents must be adept at establishing and maintaining strong relationships and coalitions of support.

Recent literature on the superintendency is replete with images of superintendents overwhelmed with seemingly innumerable political and managerial responsibilities. Some express the sense that the superintendent’s greatest potential influence lies in creating collective will and distributing leadership and influence (Leithwood, 2013; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). Despite the efforts of individual superintendents to collaboratively create and enlist support for a shared vision of success, current accountability policies make clear that the consequences of a superintendent failing to improve student achievement can be career-altering for a superintendent. Superintendents are increasingly held accountable for consistent, significant, and measurable improvements in student academic achievement. Summarizing the disparate demands, Mountford and Wallace ask, “How can contemporary school district administrators, specifically

superintendents, contend with so many difficult, and almost impossible competing commitments?” (2019, p. 4).

Superintendents as Instructional Leaders

In recent decades, increasing demands for student achievement have changed expectations for this role (Clouse et al., 2019). Bredeson stated that, “Despite the managerial activity trap that ensnares all but the most savvy of administrators, superintendents are still looked to for leadership in curriculum and instruction” (1996, pp. 245–246). Systemic improvement is dependent upon a high level of involvement in curriculum and instruction activities on the part of the school superintendent.

There are, however, fairly obvious limitations to the amount of direct instructional leadership that superintendents can provide. As noted previously, they bear a number of responsibilities related to district support that have little or nothing to do with instruction. Moreover, both organizational structures and the physical locations of district offices create real and perceived distance from the work that goes on in classrooms.

Despite these acknowledged limitations, there is increasing evidence of ways in which school districts can influence student achievement (Brandon, Hanna, Donlevy, Parsons, & Green, 2019). Superintendents can have a strong direct or indirect effect on those district characteristics associated with higher student achievement. Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Leithwood, Sun, & McCullough, 2019; McCullough & Leithwood, 2016) have identified nine practices associated with high-performing school districts: establishing a shared mission and vision, providing a coherent instructional program, using evidence to inform instructional decision-making, creating learning-oriented improvement processes, providing job-embedded professional development, aligning procedures with the mission and vision, promoting leadership-development efforts, supporting a policy-governance approach, and nurturing productive relationships. Through the ways in which they signal the importance of factors such as these, and through their efforts to foster trust in leaders and in the organization as a whole, superintendents can have a significant effect on student learning. For leaders committed to improving student achievement, these nine practices can serve as a research-based framework for their districts’ instructional improvement efforts.

The Benefits of Collaborative Practice

Based on his experience as a superintendent and an academic, Cuban made four points about the role of the superintendent as instructional leader that still apply today. First, no superintendent can “secretly improve a school district” (Cuban, 1984, p. 147). The basis of authority for a superintendent’s direction is the school board, and superintendent initiatives require the public support of the school board. Second, the superintendent makes decisions about when to “open the gate to new ideas and when to close it” (p. 147), in other words, when to deny permission and when to lend support. Third, the superintendent’s influence shapes whether or not the school district’s climate is supportive of instructional improvement. “Once the superintendent becomes identified with the mission of school improvement, even symbolic visibility in schools and classrooms carries weight” (p. 147), Cuban notes. Fourth, the superintendent’s decisions about resource allocation and staffing, particularly at the highest levels of the organization, affect the

advancement of the district's mission and efforts to monitor and assess the instructional program (Cuban, 1984).

As noted above, over the last three decades, standards-based reform has had a significant effect on school district leadership. Ideological shifts have produced an expectation on the part of policymakers and others that all students will demonstrate achievement of high academic standards on mandatory tests, and that educators can be expected to face consequences that can range from public humiliation to loss of pay or employment, should students fail to demonstrate desired gains. Though not directly involved in work at the classroom level, superintendents are increasingly held accountable for guiding and shaping the organizational vision, and, ultimately, the organizational culture, to the degree that the norms of the organization reflect an ongoing commitment to constant improvements in the academic performance of all students.

School superintendents are called upon to align their practices with the measurable outcomes on which they and their schools will be judged. They must understand and communicate to various audiences a wide range of legal requirements reflecting the will of federal, state, and local regulatory bodies, and they must also acquire and demonstrate fluency in existing and emerging knowledge on topics as complex and varied as school finance, student learning styles, personnel policies, instructional practices, personalized learning, air quality in buildings, behavioral and physiological disorders, and school safety. They must do so while attempting to satisfy diverse community concerns that run from the win-loss record of the football team to local tax rates to which bathroom children are permitted to use. The stakes faced by superintendents are high, and district leaders are challenged to provide the guidance and support needed in order for the students who are in their care to thrive.

Board members and evaluation of the superintendent

An exhaustive discussion of board-superintendent relations will not be undertaken here, but it is important to consider the role of board members as evaluators of the superintendent. In many instances, the evaluation process can be productive and purposeful, with the board and superintendent communicating a clear and unifying vision for the district. Unfortunately, however, this process can also be the superintendent's "worst nightmare when it is conducted in a climate of fear, distrust, malice, and petty politics" (Hoyle & Skrla, 1999, p. 406). It has been argued that superintendent-school board relationships have become increasingly politicized in recent decades (Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2008; Thompson & Holt, 2016). This can lead to an approach to superintendent evaluation that is more reflective of the influence of pressure groups than the superintendent's job effectiveness.

There is some evidence that, in addition to other indicators, firsthand observations and community feedback about superintendents' relationships with others are significant factors in superintendent evaluations by the school board. Research by Gore (2016) revealed that board members look for evidence of harmonious relationships between superintendents and others, as well as evidence of improving student achievement. A separate statewide study (Webner, De Jong, Campoli, & Rush, 2017) found that board presidents perceived such responsibilities as effective relationships with the school board and the community, developing a healthy culture, effectively managing the budget, and being visible in the community as important factors in the evaluation of superintendents.

Board members bear many responsibilities, and legitimate questions can be raised about whether or not board members are adequately trained to carry out these responsibilities. Although

research has demonstrated the importance and benefits of targeted school board trainings (Gann, 2016; Hess & Meeks, 2010; Plough, 2014; Reimer, 2015; Weiss, Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2014; Wilkins, 2015), less than half of U.S. states require some type of training for individuals elected to school boards (Cook, 2014; Pollard, 2012). In the state where this study was conducted, board members face no requirements other than being a resident for at least one year immediately prior to a school board election and being registered to vote. Brenner and colleagues reached a reasonable conclusion when they stated that, “Board members cannot monitor what they do not understand” (Brenner, Sullivan, & Dalton, 2002, p. iv).

A nationwide survey of board members and superintendents identified financial management, student achievement, and meeting goals as important factors in the evaluation of superintendents (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Over 90 percent of board members in this study identified these as very or extremely important in superintendent evaluations. Only 61 percent of board members in this study indicated that parental satisfaction was extremely or very important. Among superintendents, financial management (95 %), meeting goals (91 %), and having effective working relationships (89 %) were rated as very or extremely important factors in their evaluation. Significantly, although two-thirds of board members viewed student achievement as an extremely important indicator in superintendent evaluation, only 40 % of superintendents rated this as a very or extremely important factor in their evaluation.

Method

Research Questions

This study was carried out with the hope that it would help to inform graduate programs in educational leadership and provide insights that would be of benefit to practicing superintendents, governing boards, and the students they serve. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of currently-employed superintendents in this state?
2. What are the perceptions of school superintendents with respect to the evaluation process used by board members?
3. What do superintendents view as the most important factors in their evaluation by school boards?

Participants

In the state in which this study was conducted, public school districts can range in size from a handful to up to tens of thousands of students. The districts include the populations one might expect to find in a rapidly-growing border state, as well as populations one may not expect to find, including large communities of refugees from Africa or east Asia. In communities across the state, school districts are often among the largest employers in a community, and their success or failure can have a profound effect on not only the students that they serve, but also the economies and social fabric of the communities where they are located.

Invitations to participate in this Internet-based survey were distributed via email to all members of a professional membership organization representing the vast majority of superintendents in the state.

In the state in question, there are 206 school districts that are categorized as either:

- Common school districts, serving pre-K through eighth grade
- Unified school districts, serving pre-K through twelfth grade
- Union high school districts, serving grades nine through twelve

Sixty-three completed surveys were received from superintendents, representing 31% of the above districts in the state. State law provides for other types of school districts including county accommodation districts and joint technological education districts. Five surveys were received from superintendents of such districts.

This is a state that is predominantly rural, with 98.1% of the state’s area designated as such (US Census Bureau, 2010). The remaining 1.9% of the state’s land is occupied by 89.8% of the state’s residents. Rural school districts, some covering several thousand square miles, serve the far reaches of the state (“School Districts by Geographic Size Ranking Table,” 2018). Despite the fact that many rural school districts cover large geographic areas, their enrollment tends to be generally smaller than their urban and suburban counterparts, as shown in Table 1. This table also includes the percentage of respondents representing rural, suburban, and urban school districts. As indicated in Table 1, nearly two-thirds of the superintendents responding to the survey represented rural districts.

Table 1

Size and location of districts represented in this study

Location	Percentage of respondents	Average District Size
Rural	65%	1,453
Suburban	23%	10,713
Urban	12%	8,256

This sample of superintendents possessed, on average, nearly thirty years of experience in education, with an average of just under eight of those years spent as a superintendent. Only two respondents reported having fewer than 20 years of experience in education. Just under a third of respondents’ careers (9.7 years) were spent as teachers. Participants reported that they had served in their current position anywhere from a few months to 23 years, with an average of 5.7 years.

Instrument

The 64-item Internet-based survey was based on a previous survey last administered in 2008 (Chopin & Wiggall, 2011). The 2018 survey was divided into 4 broad categories:

- Governing Board evaluation of the superintendent
- Evaluation of principals
- School Finance
- Charter Schools

In general, respondents were asked to respond via a five-point rating scale indicating agreement or disagreement. Participants also had the opportunity to respond to six open-ended questions on the above topics. The specific question addressed in this study is included in the appendix to this article.

Information about the type and size of school districts, along with the gender, ethnicity, and years of experience of each respondent was collected. Neither the names of participants nor the names of the school districts was requested. The survey was open and active from October 12 to November 2, 2018.

Results

Gender-related differences

Consistent with previous findings (Maranto, Carroll, Cheng, & Teodoro, 2018; Maranto, Teodoro, Carroll, & Cheng, 2017) the state’s female superintendents reported spending nearly three years more as teachers before becoming a principal than their male counterparts. As shown in Table 2, female superintendents also reported spending more total years on average in education (31.0) than male superintendents (29.1).

Table 2

Career Experiences of male and female superintendents

Career Experience	Male	Female
Total years in education	29.1	31.0
Total years as a teacher	8.6	11.5
Total years as a school administrator	19.3	19.1
Total years as a superintendent	8.7	6.6
Total years in current position	5.9	5.4

The superintendency has historically been made up predominantly of males, and that continues to be the case with this sample, with 38% of respondents being female. That is an increase from a 2008 study in the same state, in which 27% of respondents reported being female. These results are similar to those from another recent study from another western U.S. state, which reported that 25% of superintendents were female (Clouse et al., 2019).

Female superintendents also reported leading smaller school districts. The average enrollment of a female-led school district was 3,042. The average enrollment of a male-led school district was 77% larger, at 5,386.

From this sample, males appeared to be more likely to lead K-12 and union high school districts, and females were more likely to lead K-8 districts. 69% of K-12 districts reportedly were led by male superintendents, and 62% of K-8 districts were led by female superintendents.

Governing board evaluation of the superintendent

Superintendents reported high perceived levels of trust with board members. Over 92 percent of superintendents responded “*Agree*” or “*Strongly Agree*” to the statement, “In general, board members have a high level of trust in the superintendent's abilities.” Over 70% percent of superintendents responded “*Agree*” or “*Strongly Agree*” to the statement, “There is a degree of comfort that the Board's evaluation of the superintendent will be fair and unbiased.” Similarly, 83 percent of superintendents responded “*Agree*” or “*Strongly Agree*” to the statement, “With respect to the evaluation process, school board members in my district are trustworthy.” These findings are similar to the results of a recent study which revealed that 81% of New York superintendents reported harmonious relationships with the board (Bell, 2019).

Superintendents were asked to rank the five most important factors in their evaluation by board members. As shown in Table 3, from a provided list of 23 factors in the governing board’s evaluation of the superintendent, the listed percentages of superintendents identified the following factors as being ranked in the top five:

Table 3

Percentage of superintendents selecting the factor as one of the most important factors in their evaluation by board members

Factor	Percentage of respondents identifying factor as most important
Management of Financial Affairs of District	61.9%
Maintaining the Quality of the Education Program	52.4%
Relationship with Employees	47.6%
Developing and Implementing Long Term Plans for District	44.4%
Student Performance Measured by State-Mandated Assessments	44.4%
Maintaining a Safe Environment for Students	42.9%
Relationship with the Board as a Whole	38.1%
Relationship with the Community at Large	38.1%
Attracting and Retaining Staff	30.2%
Developing Innovative Education Programs	20.6%
Developing Short Term Plans in Reaction to District Problems/Crisis Situation	12.7%
Maintaining a Balanced Budget	12.7%
Relationship with Community Leadership (not on Board)	11.1%
Relationship with Individual Members of the Board	11.1%
Accuracy of the Budget	9.5%
Student Discipline (Represented by the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions)	7.9%
Relationship with Parents Having Conflict with District	4.8%
Relationship with Teacher Leadership	3.2%
Removing Ineffective Employees	3.2%
Number of Students Going on to Higher Education	1.6%
Success of the Athletic Program	1.6%

Somewhat surprisingly, nearly all of the 23 items were selected by at least one superintendent. Only two items from the original list were not selected by any superintendent: “Not Reducing or Eliminating Student Educational Opportunities,” and “Personal Appearance.”

Since superintendents were asked to rank the five most important factors with the numbers 1-5, their responses can be further examined to identify those factors which received a rating of “1.” When examined in light of the factors selected as their number 1 priority, superintendents responded as indicated below. In Table 3, “Maintaining a Safe environment for Students” was not among the top five factors; however, as shown in Table 4, it received the second-highest number of selections as the highest priority. “Management of Financial Affairs of District” was the highest priority in each analysis.

Table 4

Percentage of superintendents rating selected factors as their highest priority

Factor	Percentage
Management of Financial Affairs of District	23.8%
Maintaining a Safe Environment for Students	14.3%
Maintaining the Quality of the Education Program	12.7%
Student Performance Measured by State-Mandated Assessments	12.7%
Relationship with the Board as a Whole	11.1%

Superintendents were able to provide open-ended responses to the question, “Would you like to make any comments regarding the evaluation of the superintendent?” Despite reporting high levels of trust with the board, representative responses to this question included the following:

“I am not sure that the Board always is aware of the magnitude of day to day tasks carried out by the superintendent.”

“Many board members do not have the expertise to be evaluating the superintendent.”

“The model is not conducive to excellent evaluation because of the level of politics... No other model in America takes five to seven people off of the street to evaluate the CEO of a \$300 Million operation.”

“The school board generally lacks in actual understanding of the process and district responsibilities and often don't appear to care about it beyond their personal agendas.”

Discussion

Implications for Practice

As indicated from the findings of this study, the participants tended to enter the superintendency after approximately 21 years in the field of education. Approximately half of their pre-superintendency time was typically spent in classroom teaching, and the other half in administration. Given policymakers’ demands for student achievement, the centrality of student achievement as a goal for all school districts, and the relatively short amount of their careers that superintendents spend in the classroom, it is essential that efforts be undertaken to develop the instructional leadership skills and knowledge of current and aspiring superintendents. The

framework developed by Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2019; McCullough & Leithwood, 2016) would be a useful guide for such efforts.

The factors that are perceived as important in superintendent evaluation should receive ample attention in leadership-preparation programs. Students who are preparing for superintendent certification should thoughtfully consider how they would approach the board-superintendent relationship and how they would create an environment in which the evaluation process is as productive as possible. Moreover, faculty in educational leadership courses must endeavor to ensure that coursework is current and relevant. Although school finance coursework is typically included in a certification program of study, it is not unusual for superintendents to be inadequately prepared to manage a district's finances (Abshier, Harris, & Hopson, 2011), even though financial management is a top concern. Finance courses with a heavy reliance on a textbook may not contribute to the level of technical knowledge needed by superintendents.

In practical terms, two areas of governing board training are suggested by the findings of this study. As was noted by some participants' responses to open-ended questions, governing board members do not necessarily bring any special expertise to the role of evaluator of the superintendent. As noted previously, the National School Boards Association (Cook, 2014; Pollard, 2012) has reported that less than half of U.S. states require some type of training for individuals elected to school boards. Although any training offered would involve voluntary participation, its effects could potentially be significant in improving board members' competence in providing constructive and meaningful evaluative feedback to superintendents.

A second area of governing board training could be in the area of gender bias. Females make up three quarters of the teaching workforce – a percentage that has increased over the last two decades – yet hold fewer than half of the positions in administration across the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Despite increases in the percentage of superintendent positions held by females from 2008-2018, females continue to be underrepresented in the superintendency. While this underrepresentation may in part be a function of female principals' disinterest in becoming superintendents (Maranto et al., 2017), it may also be a function of gender bias that could be addressed through increased awareness and improved training of both governing board members and district-level leaders.

On the subject of training for school board members, given the absence of statutory requirements related to such training, it is generally the case that at least some of the responsibility for training board members falls to the superintendent. Given this fact, leadership-preparation programs may be able to better prepare future superintendents for the responsibilities of training and guiding board members through case scenarios and the study of effective practices (Bowers, 2016; Scudero, 2019).

Recommendations for Further Research

Noted above were some suggestions related to training for board members. These areas of training may offer opportunities for research into the effectiveness of such training and the impact on superintendent-governing board relations.

Future research in this area that would benefit the field would involve a more detailed study of the specific processes used in the evaluation of superintendents. The authors of this study possess several decades of experience as superintendents, and can relate firsthand and anecdotal accounts of evaluation processes that vary quite substantially from district to district. Additional research is needed to examine board members' and superintendents' views of the evaluation

process and whether it contributes to superintendent effectiveness or simply amounts to a routine exercise.

It is recommended that continued research be conducted to develop greater understanding of the factors that discourage and inhibit female administrators' advancement. There is a need to better understand the dynamics of gender bias and the relationship between gender and factors such as culture, climate, and leadership practices that are known to affect student achievement. As noted above, females now hold a greater share of superintendent positions in this state than was the case ten years ago. If the current rate of change were to continue, this would mean that half of the state's superintendents would be female by 2030. Notably, although this would represent significant growth in the percentage of female superintendents, it would still fall well short of reflecting the field as a whole.

Conclusions

Superintendents face a number of challenges. Like their counterparts in other states, the superintendents in this sample contend with issues such as inadequate and unreliable revenue streams, and the demands of accountability policies. Perhaps to a greater extent than their counterparts elsewhere, they must also contend with a long-term teacher shortage, as well as statutes that aggressively promote free-market competition through school choice and charter schools. That they largely are able provide all students with an education in the face of these challenges is remarkable.

The most important factors identified by superintendents in this study are indicative of many of the contemporary issues addressed in recent literature on the superintendency. Similar to the nationwide study of board members and superintendents conducted nearly a decade ago by Hess and Meeks (2010), financial management surfaced as the most frequently-cited factor. Also similar to the findings from the Hess and Meeks study, student achievement, a focus on the achievement of goals, and relationships were also ranked highly in the present study. Although maintaining a safe environment for students was not mentioned in the Hess and Meeks data, it is understandable why this is identified as an important factor in the present study.

Petersen and Fusarelli assert that "It is unrealistic to believe school boards will be abolished any time in the next several decades" (2008, p. 129). If, as expected, this governance model indeed persists in the coming years, then it is worth the investment of time and effort for researchers, professors of educational leadership, practicing superintendents, and school board associations to continue to work toward understanding how to shape the board-superintendent relationship as one that is marked by trust, mutual respect, and a deep commitment to the district's goals.

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Appendix

Question 21 – Statewide Survey of Superintendents

Following are a list of factors that may be used by Boards of Education in the evaluation of the superintendent. Review this list and identify the five most important items to your Board in your evaluation. Rank them 1 through 5 by placing a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 in the space to the left of the item. *Please select only five.*

Possible Items Considered by the Board in the Evaluation of the Superintendent

Accuracy of the Budget
Attracting and Retaining Staff
Developing and Implementing Long Term Plans for District
Developing Innovative Education Programs
Developing Short Term Plans in Reaction to District Problems/Crisis Situation
Maintaining a Balanced Budget
Maintaining a Safe Environment for Students
Maintaining the Quality of the Education Program
Management of Financial Affairs of District
Not Reducing or Eliminating Student Educational Opportunities
Number of Students Going on to Higher Education
Personal Appearance
Public Speaking Ability
Relationship with Community Leadership (not on Board)
Relationship with Employees Relationship with Teacher Leadership
Relationship with Individual Members of the Board
Relationship with Parents Having Conflict with District
Relationship with the Board as a Whole
Relationship with the Community at Large
Removing Ineffective Employees
Student Discipline
Student Performance Measured by State Mandated Assessments
Success of the Athletic Program