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AASA New Superintendents E-Journal

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Editor's Note

Dear Colleagues,

The *AASA New Superintendents E-Journal* is a quarterly publication tailored to the needs of new superintendents. Each edition includes three articles prepared by new and seasoned superintendents, educational leadership professors, consultants and practicing school administrators. This edition of the journal addresses engaging the community and staff in system-wide change, developing a "transition map" for entry into a school district, and implementing a detailed plan for hiring.

In his article "Culture and Context: Understanding Where Your Are so You Know Where to Go and How to Get There," Joshua Starr, superintendent of Stamford Public Schools (CT) traces his efforts as a first-time superintendent to engage a diverse community and staff in bringing about meaningful and sustained improvement in their schools.

In the second article, "Creating a Transition Map for a New Superintendency: 7 Powerful Strategies," Patrick Sanaghan and James "Torch" Lytle present a detailed plan for a successful transition into the superintendency, from maneuvering negotiations with the board to building relational capital and being a good listener. The authors draw from their experience as veteran education leaders.

Finally, Fred Nolan, superintendent of the Foley Public Schools in Minnesota, shares his efforts to develop a carefully designed administrative hiring rubric. He presents a step-by-step process for competing for the best candidate and obtaining broad community acceptance of the person selected for the job.

Future issues of the *AASA New Superintendents E-Journal* will look at such topics as systems thinking, sustaining a district vision, and board relations. Authors interested in submitting articles are encouraged to contact the editor. Submissions are invited throughout the year.

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Creating a Transition Map for a New Superintendency: 7 Powerful Strategies

By Patrick Sanaghan and James “Torch” Lytle

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A new superintendent’s transition into a school district is a fragile time. History is being made, changes are looming and hopes and fears are high. A new superintendent must navigate through complexity, culture, politics and stakeholder expectations. It is a rigorous journey that requires careful and strategic management.

As a veteran school administrator and former urban school superintendent, and an organizational development consultant with 20 years of experience with senior leadership transitions, we hope the information and advice we share here help first-time superintendents create a strategic approach to their leadership transition. We use the metaphor of a transition map to convey a sense of journey and the thoughtful approach new superintendents must take if they are to successfully transition into their districts.

Strategy #1: Negotiate your contract and establish your relationship with the board.

One of the most challenging aspects of becoming a superintendent is managing your relationship with the board. The transition from being a candidate to being the board’s first choice happens quickly and the temptation is to get your employment contract signed as fast as possible so you can get on with the job.

Instead of rushing to seal the deal, take some time to pause and reflect. What is it about you that makes you the board’s preferred candidate? What did the board, district employees, parents and the community learn about you as the selection process evolved? Have those you’ve worked with elsewhere given you strong support, or do you have history that may create doubts? Are you the right one for this job at this time? Do your experience, disposition and capabilities match what this district needs right now? Do you get good vibes from the board? How many members are committed to long-term service?

Keep these questions—and answers—in mind as you approach contract negotiations. We suggest that you have your own attorney as you navigate this task. The following are some questions that you should consider:

- What assurances do I want?
- How am I going to use my contract negotiations and language to clarify my relationship to the board? For example, what will be the board’s role in personnel selection and appointment?
- Am I amenable to performance incentives?
- How will the terms of my contract affect negotiations with various employee groups?
- What are my salary and benefit requests, and how do they compare to those of my predecessors and of superintendents in comparable districts?

Negotiating your contract isn't simply a business transaction. As the superintendent, you are probably the only employee with whom the board has an individual agreement. Developing and authorizing your contract will signal to the board a great deal about who you are and what you're about. Are you all about children or does your self-interest come first?

The biggest problems in the whole contract negotiating process are wanting the job too much and getting caught up in the image of yourself leading this community.

Strategy #2: Do your homework.

New superintendents should request that a short (one-page) survey with five or six key questions be distributed throughout the school district *before* they come on board. The human resources director or a responsible central officer administrator should organize the process, but the survey results should go directly to the new superintendent and the school board.

The responses should be *anonymous* to ensure honest answers. Only the participant's role (for example, teacher, board member, principal, parent) should be identified so that the responses can be compared across stakeholder groups. The survey sample should include at least 100 people from diverse stakeholder groups.

Here are some suggested questions:

1. What are you most proud of about the school district? (What do we do well?)
2. What are the three top challenges facing the school district during the next 5–10 years?
3. What traditions and values must we preserve as we move forward? Why are these important?
4. What is one thing you would like to change or improve so that we can provide a first-class education for all students?
5. What is one piece of advice would help me be effective in my new role?
6. What skills and qualities will our students need to thrive in the future?
7. How would you describe the culture and climate of the school district (for example, open, welcome, resistant to change)?
8. What is one issue that, if we dealt with it, would improve the effectiveness of the school district?

Whatever questions you ask, the key is to obtain the type of information you need to understand the complexity of the school district, its culture, aspirations, values and challenges.

Conducting a survey like this has many benefits: (1) New superintendents will get information that will leverage their learning curve in powerful ways; (2) They will be smarter about the system than almost anyone else because they will have a systemic picture of the district; and (3) Stakeholders will realize that you asked them for their input, which communicates that you value their ideas.

Most importantly, the survey results should be shared with all relevant parties so that they understand the strengths of the school district and the issues facing it. The survey can often create a platform for real discussion and dialogue because it shows respect for people's participation.

The next several strategies provide specific advice about what you should do after you come on board.

Strategy #3: Enter the superintendency with a learning attitude.

One superintendent we know used a strategic approach to learning that taught him about critical subject areas and issues, modeled a learning attitude for others, and created a forum for stakeholders throughout the school district to also learn about these important subject areas.

On entering the school district, this new superintendent asked that he be “tutored” in a strategic area such as budget or curriculum every morning during a two-week period. For example, for the budget tutoring, the chief financial officer prepared an informative yet layperson-friendly presentation on the budget.

The program was unique because any interested people such as other administrators, parents, teachers, community members and principals could attend these tutoring sessions. After the presentations, participants could ask questions about the topic and then participate in an open discussion.

These tutoring sessions accomplished several things. They modeled a learning attitude by the new superintendent; informed many people about the complexity of the school district; quickly cultivated an attitude of trust in the new leader because he was able to show competence and collegiality in these sessions; and communicated transparency as a value to relevant stakeholders.

The sessions also gave the superintendent a sense of the capabilities of key staff, the concerns of the community and the challenges and opportunities the district faced.

Strategy #4: Request a learning network.

New superintendents entering a school district must find ways to manage their own learning. There is a great deal to learn about the complexity of a school district, and there is little time to do so. That’s where a learning network comes in.

A learning network is a group of highly credible individuals who understand how the school district works. The board chair, human resources director or a competent central administrator should organize this list of key stakeholders. These individuals should understand the organization’s culture, know something about the history of the school district, have a sense of the politics in the school district and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. Also, they should be people who can speak the truth and who have integrity and wisdom.

The new superintendent should meet with these individuals before coming on board—ideally one-on-one. This will give the new superintendent a chance to connect with them and establish a relationship. The superintendent could review the survey data with them, validate the returns, and introduce discussion topics that will illuminate the school district’s workings. These folks can describe the culture or the political terrain, explain how decisions are made or comment on the board’s effectiveness or the business community’s support for the school district.

The superintendent should ask each learning network member the name of someone else who might provide quality information and advice. This expands the network, provides a new information stream and enables the superintendent to build more connections before assuming the new position.

These interactions also will shape the early perceptions of the superintendent because individuals will go back to their stakeholder groups and share their first impressions of the superintendent.

Strategy #5: Build relational capital.

Building relationships may be the most important thing a new superintendent can do to ensure a successful transition. Without positive, constructive and authentic relationships with people, you cannot lead effectively. People will simply not perform at the high levels that are needed if they do not *feel* connected to their leader.

If a new superintendent cannot connect with people personally--with their values, traditions, hopes and aspirations--that superintendent will fail. Brilliant ideas or "visions" alone will not carry the day.

We like the metaphor of a "bucket of goodwill" to describe the relational capital a new superintendent needs in order to accomplish results for the school district. Superintendents need to keep their buckets as full as possible because they can get emptied quickly. A public mistake, a budget shortfall, a sticky personnel issue or a board conflict can force superintendents to dip into their buckets to weather the storm. If the bucket is empty when a problem occurs, the superintendent will take a hit from which he or she may never recover.

Superintendents build relational capital by listening to others and reflecting back what they are hearing and learning, being transparent in their decision-making processes, sharing information widely so that stakeholders feel informed, acting with integrity, being respectful of the school district's history and values, being fair in their dealings with others, and owning their mistakes. Again, there is nothing new or brilliant about these ideas, but they can be difficult to implement. They take discipline, commitment and courage.

Strategy #6: Be as visible as you can be.

A superintendent's transition is a stressful time, even if it is highly anticipated and welcome. People have fears, concerns, hopes and aspirations. Will I have power? Am I in or out of the inner circle? Will I be able to influence decision making? What changes will the new superintendent make? Will I be able to work effectively with the new superintendent?

It is important that a new superintendent not get trapped in central office machinations, meetings and tactics. Superintendents need to get out, be seen and interact with people. This will happen only if the new superintendent plans to do this before transitioning into the new role. It helps to map out times to meet with parents, principals, teachers and central office personnel, and then organize the regular schedule around those meetings.

If possible, new superintendents should organize a series of "chews and chats" where groups informally meet with them over coffee and donuts or lunch to discuss issues and ideas. These informal gatherings will help new leaders connect with people, seek advice, assess people's concerns and aspirations and, most importantly, become known.

Superintendents cannot be visible all the time, but they can be “strategically visible” by visiting schools (at least one a day), attending school district events (large and small), meeting with parents and attending faculty meetings and community events. This strategic visibility builds street credibility because people will know that the new leader isn’t leading from afar but is connected to the community and its schools.

During the first year, it is essential that the new superintendent stay in the school district as much as possible. This means limiting attendance at out-of-area conferences, involvement in national networks, teaching at a local university and being a board member of another organization. It is important that the first year be focused on school district matters and being visibly present to each stakeholder group. After the first year, the new superintendent can gradually but cautiously add external commitments.

Strategy #7: Be a good listener.

We agree with leadership expert Ron Heifetz, who suggests that many leaders tend to die with their mouths open. Being a good listener is much more difficult than it sounds because most leaders believe they are good listeners. But we have found this rarely to be true.

Listening authentically is difficult. In an age when we live on sound bites, when we get points for acting fast and responding quickly, it takes real discipline to slow down mentally and listen to others. It also means being open to others and being informed, even influenced, by them.

When people *feel* listened to by their leaders, they feel respected and valued; they tend to tell their stories, share their hopes and fears and give good advice. In short, they tell a new superintendent much of the information needed for success, and this information makes the leader smarter and more effective.

And by the way, the folks who are “multi-taskers,” using their Blackberrys or reading articles and reports during meetings, communicate disrespect, disinterest and discourtesy to others. These are three messages you don’t want to convey. As far as we know, research does not prove that you can do two things at once *well*, so you’re probably being ineffective.

We hope that some of these suggestions help new and aspiring superintendents. The lessons learned have been learned the hard way, from many tragic transitions. It will take time and attention to create your own “map” and navigate the complex terrain that awaits you. Good luck on your journey.

Culture and Context: Understanding Where You Are so You Know Where to Go and

How to Get There

By Joshua Starr

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We all know that change is difficult, and real change rarely takes place without resistance. Some of the same people who say that change is necessary are not willing to change what they, themselves, do every day. And some of the people who embrace change and actually work hard to adopt new practices are those who, at first blush, seemed to be ardent resistors.

One of the most important things a new superintendent can do to help pave the way for successful change within the school system is to develop a good understanding of the district culture.

I was hired as the superintendent of schools in Stamford, Connecticut, in May 2005 specifically to be a change agent. Stamford is a vibrant city of approximately 120,000 people that lies at the southwest corner of Connecticut. Many residents work in New York City or for one of the large corporations headquartered in Stamford. We have 15,000 children enrolled in 20 schools, and we are very diverse: 40% White, 22% Black, 30% Latino, 8% Asian, 38% free/reduced-price lunch and 16% English Language Learners.

The diversity and complexity of Stamford make it a wonderful and challenging place to be superintendent. Many of our children do extremely well and go on to thrive in college and beyond. Other children fail to read, write and do math on grade level and leave the school system with few options. Predictably, this difference in outcomes largely falls along lines of ethnicity and socio-economic status.

In bringing me to Stamford, the board of education sought to challenge the status quo. I was a 35-year-old educator with a background in accountability who had never been a superintendent or a principal. Clearly, I did not fit the traditional profile of most new superintendents. Teachers, parents and community members had as many questions about me as I did about them.

This fact leads me to my first observation about understanding district culture and effecting meaningful change:

Observation #1: Opportunities to interact one-on-one, in large groups, and in small groups help the new superintendent get to know the district and help the staff, parents and community become acquainted with the new superintendent.

Beginning my job in May served me well. The school year had not ended, so I could meet people and attend school and community events. I had a clear entry plan that I shared throughout the district so everyone knew exactly what I was doing at the beginning of my tenure. I based my entry plan on the books *Entry* by Barry Jentz and *Managing Transitions* by William Bridges.

One of the major aspects of my entry plan was to meet individually with about 50 people. I met with each principal, board member, and key central staff member. I also asked board members to recommend individuals with whom I should meet.

I asked everyone the same three questions, which were developed by Carmen Farina, the former deputy chancellor for teaching and learning in New York City, with whom I had worked prior to coming to Stamford: (1) What are you most proud of and do well? (2) Why do some children in Stamford achieve at high levels and others do not? (3) What would you do if you were I?

At first, I was worried that these three questions wouldn't be enough to get the information I sought, but I was wrong. They were great launching pads for deeper conversation. I talked in depth with some people about race, the achievement gap and our own personal stories; other people had tears in their eyes as they described their own experiences as children or with children; others gave milquetoast answers that we've heard too many times.

These conversations gave me an opportunity to share myself and my experiences and passions. I also received a good introduction to what district leaders thought about the issues Stamford confronted. That helped me craft my message for a wider audience as I went forth into the schools and into the larger community.

This leads to my second observation about understanding culture:

Observation #2: The superintendent needs a clear and simple message to communicate to all audiences. This message provides a launching pad for deeper conversation that will help a new superintendent understand the dynamics and history of the district.

Beginning on the day I arrived in Stamford, I continually discussed three principles that I expected to be held accountable for: equity, transparency and engagement. I talked about these ideas everywhere I went, emphasizing that each child deserves to have access to high-quality, standards-based instruction; that I would be open and honest with how and why I made decisions; and that we would collectively build the world that we wanted Stamford children to live in.

It was the third principle, engagement, that helped me really understand the culture of the Stamford Public Schools. I decided to hold a community forum once a month as a way to engage families, educators and community members in understanding the reality of the Stamford Public Schools. I also took this opportunity to gather input to set our future direction.

This forum idea stemmed from three factors: (1) The board had set community engagement as a goal for me and for them; (2) One of the most important roles of the leader is to create a sense of urgency and shared reality; and (3) I love to teach, and the community forum provided an opportunity for me to teach the community about education in the 21^{st} century. I wanted to teach people about NCLB, 21^{st} century skills, special education, English language learners and other topics that face educators today.

Every community forum follows the same format: a 20-30 minute presentation about the data, a one-hour small-group discussion about the data using a simple protocol, and a 30-minute whole-group conversation and question-and-answer session. These forums have been wonderful data-gathering exercises for me, the scientist-superintendent. Not only do they provide an opportunity to communicate my message, they also allow me to hear the concerns, ideas, questions and dreams of our teachers, families, administrators and community members. The input led directly to my strategic plan, and it has helped me to discern patterns of thought within the Stamford community.

Many of the themes that have emerged from the forums are repeated in other engagement opportunities such as PTO meetings at schools; informal “conversations with Josh” with teachers at every school; meetings with high school students a few times each year; neighborhood chats with small groups of families in their living rooms, houses of worship or community centers; regular meetings with representatives from the political community; formal monthly meetings with a district leadership team comprised of teachers, secretaries, educational assistants, parents and administrators; and monthly meetings with representatives of each bargaining unit.

These interactions have helped me understand the dynamics of Stamford so that ideas I have and actions I want to take can be contextualized within the interests of many different groups, each of which has its own constituency.

One of my greatest challenges as superintendent is reconciling my own desires and ideas for change with those of the community members. While I may have some very distinct ideas for improvement, I first must understand how to move an idea through the local context if it is to have a chance for success.

My third observation is perhaps the most important thing that I have learned about the Stamford culture during the past two and one-half years:

Observation #3: Many people think that education is a zero-sum game; they do not understand how a school district can meet the needs of students who are below standard without taking away resources from students who are at or above standards.

When the politics of local taxes, NCLB, and state accountability, in addition to the new demands of the 21st century economy, are added to the mix, this issue becomes that much more complicated.

The superintendent’s job within this dynamic can be difficult and frustrating at times. Often, we know the right thing to do, yet others do not share our beliefs. Our success as superintendents rests on our ability to understand the hot points within our communities and the dynamics of the local culture so we can create the context for the “right thing” to work when implemented.

One of the most fulfilling things I do as superintendent is to participate in the Connecticut Superintendents network. This is a group of about 20 superintendents who meet monthly with the Connecticut Center for School Change and Harvard Professors Lee Teitel and Richard Elmore. We visit each other’s schools and discuss how we can stay focused on instruction in the classroom in the midst of the competing demands of our work.

Each participant in the network is required to develop an explicit theory of action. A theory of action is a fundamental belief that you have about how change happens. It cannot be static, and therefore needs to be revisited regularly. My theory of action is that “If the right people are engaged with each other around the important questions about student achievement, we will collectively develop the right solutions."

My theory is also my conclusion. After hypothesizing, observing, and experimenting, I have concluded that my success as a superintendent depends on the extent to which I engage people in building the future of the Stamford Public Schools. Together, we must ask questions, review data, wrestle with the big ideas, negotiate the details, and challenge each other to be the change that we want to see.

Engagement helps me understand the culture. Knowing the culture helps me ask the right questions. This, in turn, leads to making the right decisions that will help each and every child in Stamford achieve.

A Game Plan for Hiring Principals

By Fred Nolan

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Effective schools research continues to point to the principal's central role in every aspect of quality schools. Therefore, one of the most important of a superintendent's tasks is hiring principals and other members of the administrative cabinet.

You probably participated on teacher-hiring teams as a principal or district-level administrator. Hiring principals has a much higher profile in the community and much higher stakes for the success of the school and district with regard to educating the youth of the community.

As superintendent of Foley Public Schools in Central Minnesota (student population 1,685) I had the opportunity and responsibility for guiding the process to hire four administrators within 15 months. I worked with Bruce Miles of Great River Consulting to develop a checklist that achieves the following four significant aims of successful administrative hiring:

1. Creates the performance target that details the leadership needs and strengths of the building or department that will be matched with a leader's talents, interests

and aptitudes. (This goal is outlined in *The Jossey Bass Academic Administrator's Guide to Academic Hiring*, by R. Levin and J. Rosse.)

2. Creates multiple points of involvement for staff, community, school board members and students (in the case of secondary administration), yet retains the superintendent's role to ensure a good fit between the superintendent and principal or administrator.
3. Focuses on the skill sets and performance record of the candidates with multiple measures to clearly identify the candidate who best meets the leadership needs of the building and district. (Douglas Reeves discusses this point in his article, "New Ways to Hire Administrators," in the May 2007 issue of *Educational Leadership*.)
4. Creates the transparency and a paper trail to build confidence, support and trust that the best available candidate was selected and recruited to serve as principal for the specific building in your district and meets the requirements for public disclosure and non-discriminatory hiring.

We can conceptualize the four-part process as an athletic tournament. First you prepare for the tournament—you do the work necessary before the position is posted. Second, you participate in the early rounds—you collect applications. Third, you participate in the quarterfinals through the finals—you launch the selection process and identify the final candidate. Finally, you award the trophy—you negotiate the contract, get board approval and present the selection to the press and community.

Visualize center court Wimbledon this past July when Venus Williams and Roger Federer each hoisted the trophy in front of adoring fans. That is the vision of a successful administrative hiring, with your new principal holding up the trophy. I outline here in detail, steps leading to that victory celebration.

<u>Step One: Preparation Prior to Posting a Position (3–9 months in advance)</u>

- Negotiate changes in the principals' master agreement to reflect any new language or benefits the board would like for new principals.

- Update the job application to include waiver of rights to damages for references and to penalize falsehoods with immediate dismissal.
- Discuss and create an agreement with the board on roles and responsibilities in the hiring for you, the board, staff, community and students (in the case of a high school principal or district activities director).

True Story: I use an organizational chart to show that I am the immediate supervisor for administrators, so if in the hiring process, a clear consensus #1 candidate emerges, the decision about who makes the final recommendation is a moot point.

But if there is no clear #1 and several acceptable candidates, who makes that final determination? The board agreed, somewhat reluctantly on some points, that in the screening and interviewing stages they would provide input to me about the candidates, but the recommendation of a candidate for hire would be mine. They would vote on that recommendation.

- Discuss and create an agreement with the board regarding the budget for the selection process, role of a consultant and process for contracting with a consultant.
- Discuss with the board a salary range if not determined by the principals' master agreement.
- Have the consultant (or a good facilitator who has no stake in this decision) facilitate in separate groups the staff, community/parents, board/administration and students (for high school administrator and activities director) to develop the vision for the building, priorities for the building and the hard and soft skills desired in a principal. Organize and feed these back to all the groups.
- Revise the job description based on the visioning activity and any other administrative assignments included in the position.
- Create a brochure or web slide show highlighting the building and include information from the visioning activity.

- Create a page on the district's website that centers on this particular hiring with all the relevant information: brochure or slide show, visioning activity results, job posting, job application and links to other websites of interest to candidates such as the chamber of commerce, local paper, state reports, or comparisons such as the school report card produced by the state department of education.
- Set dates for résumé review, e-mail question screening, and interviewing.
- Recruit applicants as needed or desired.

<u>Step Two: Receiving Applications and Preparing the Selection Process (1 month process)</u>

- Applicants complete an application and submit a letter of interest, a résumé, their transcripts and a copy of their license.
- The administrative assistant logs all applicant information into a spreadsheet and begins e-mail correspondence with applicants, apprising them of the status of their materials.
- The administrative assistant uses a marker to create a "blind" copy of the letter of interest, résumé, and transcript (blocking out the name and address).
- Teams representative of the stakeholder groups are assembled for the résumé review, e-mail question screening and interviews.
- You and a small team of stakeholders consider the vision, priorities and hard and soft skills, and create a score sheet to rate the résumé on whether the candidates demonstrate a high, medium or low level of competence on those skills.
- The same or a different team creates a bank of 40–50 questions based on those visions, priorities and hard and soft skills. Four to six of the questions—each of which reflects a critical skill set—become the e-mail questions.
- Assuming one of your critical skill sets is using data to analyze student achievement data to guide instructional improvement, assemble the student data you want the candidates to examine.

Good Advice: As Douglas Reeves observed in his *Educational Leadership* article (May 2007), how well a principal analyzes student data is an important skill not readily observable in a standard interview. E-mail the data or the links to each candidate and ask, "What do you notice?" The richness of the responses will tell you a lot about the candidates' ability to analyze data or to find a quick source for such analysis on short notice. A follow-up question in the face-to-face interview can identify the candidates who intimately understand the school's data and the those who had some help.

- The other lists of 12–15 questions are for the board and for the staff/community interviews. Ensure that all major skills sets are probed on each question list and that each list has an appropriate opening and closing question.

<u>Step 3: The Selection: Quarterfinals, Semifinals and Finals (1 month process)</u>

- Candidates with completed application materials have made the quarterfinals or résumé review stage.

Tip: Because you want to attract quality candidates and because quality candidates are busy people with current responsibilities, make the application process easy by putting all the necessary information on one web page that is accessible by one click into your district website. Provide the application, hiring timeline, brochure or slide show about the district, a contact button to the administrative assistant handling the applications, and links to the state education department, local newspaper, city and chamber of commerce websites.

- The résumé review team reads all résumés in one room on one day. All readers use the same score sheet and individually pick their 10 semifinalists (fewer if you have fewer than 40 quarterfinalists). You need as many score sheets as the number of completed applications times the size of the review team. In other words, alot.
- Candidates chosen by 75% or more of the résumé review team are automatically semifinalists; those chosen by 25% or fewer are automatically eliminated. Discuss the semifinalists with respect to the skill sets and pare the number to 8–10 semifinalists.
- Some local candidates may not be in the final pool. Discuss whether for political reasons these candidates should be added to the pool.
- The administrative assistant e-mails the semifinalists the questions with strict rules about when their answers must be returned—usually within 36 hours. Each

e-mail question asks that the candidate list a reference (with contact information) who can attest to the response.

- The administrative assistant organizes all the candidates' e-mail responses by question rather than by candidate. This lets the reviewers compare all candidates' answers to one question and thereby determine evidence of knowledge and skills in each particular area.
- The e-mail review team members read the e-mail responses on the same day and each uses the score sheet developed for the résumé review to determine the level of skill and knowledge in the skill sets demonstrated by the e-mail responses. Then, each chooses five finalists.
- Finalists chosen by 75% or more of the e-mail review team are automatically finalists; those chosen by 25% or fewer are automatically eliminated. Team members discuss the candidates with respect to the skill sets and end up with four to six finalists.
- Some local candidates may not be in the final pool. Discuss whether for political reasons these candidates should be added to the pool.
- The e-mail review team can call references on e-mail questions of each finalist to ensure the veracity of the candidates' answers. Divide up the calling, go over the reference check procedures, and tell the team members they can begin calling references 36 hours after the candidates' questions have been reviewed.
- The administrative assistant calls to inform the finalists of their status, schedules them for an interview and tour of the facility, and tells them when reference calls will begin.
- The administrative assistant creates folders for each interviewer with complete application materials (with names) of each finalist, the e-mail questions and responses and a question list and scoring sheet for each finalist. Each finalist's materials are color coded so interviewers can keep the information together easily. Interviewers may pick up these materials one or two days before the interviews so they can become familiar with the candidates.
- Reference phone call results are compiled, color coded by candidate, and provided to the interviewers the day of the interviews. There should be at least

three reference phone calls for each candidate. Instruct the callers to e-mail the responses to you so you can clean up the grammar and ensure each candidate has a minimum of three references.

Tip: Everyone involved in the search can be involved in reference calling, and in fact I have found it helpful because you get more candid responses from multiple levels of an organization when you have administrators, teachers, board members and education assistants calling. Provide everyone with a standard set of five questions as follows:

1. How long have you known the candidate and in what capacity?
2. What are the candidate's strengths?
3. Would you hire or like to see the candidate hired (or rehired) as your principal? (Here you need to coach the callers to listen to how quickly and how enthusiastically the reference responds, as nearly all will say "yes.")
4. If we were to hire the candidate as principal, are there things we should be concerned about or watch for? (This is a way to probe for weaknesses without using the word. In "Challenges of Hiring Well," published in the June 2004 *EduExec* magazine, Lynn Little suggests the question, "What is the worst thing you can say about the candidate?
5. What should we know about the candidate that we haven't already talked about?

- The administrative assistant creates two summary sheets for each interviewer. One is an interview scoring summary and one is a forced choice score sheet. Let the collective wisdom work by letting the numbers do the talking rather than the loudest person or group.
- The administrative assistant creates a spreadsheet to track this information and to weight the board/superintendent interview team scores equally with the staff/community team scores, as normally that team is two or three times the size of the board/superintendent team.
- This information is rank ordered for "the reveal" to the combined teams at the conclusion of the last interview. All team members get their individual summaries back and a printout of all the summaries of all interviewees.

Tip: A flip chart works well to show the board and staff/community/student rankings side by side for both the interview scores and, on the next sheet, the forced choice rankings. Having the top sheet blank allows you to get everyone’s attention before you flip that over and “reveal” the interview score rankings and then the forced choice sheet.

Step 4: Awarding the Trophy and Conferring the Prize (1-5 day process)

- “The reveal” will eliminate 50%–75% of the finalists with no discussion, as they clearly didn’t score as high as the top one, two or three candidates.
- Often the reveal will surface a consensus candidate who was ranked #1 on both types of rankings. Then the question becomes, who are the #2 and #3 choices if the first or first and second choices turn down the financial offer or if they are no longer interested in the position?
- Sometimes a #1 candidate will emerge, but the interviewer teams may have some nagging questions they want answered. If that is the case, a small team needs to have an extended conversation with the candidate about those issues. Then that team needs to be empowered to either offer the job or go to the #2 candidate.
- If there is no clear #1 choice, and if two to three candidates are generally acceptable, then you as superintendent thank everyone for their time and input and select one of these two or three candidates, maybe after an extended conversation with each and some more reference calls.
- When the finalist is chosen, you offer the job, send the contract or master agreement and negotiate salary and side issues (48–72 hours). Your board chair needs to be wired with you on the negotiations.

Word to the wise: Do not be surprised if the candidate does not accept at once; in fact, you want someone who thinks this over carefully before saying “yes.” Usually the finalist needs to consult with a spouse and family. Sometimes the salary needs to be sweetened or perhaps moving expenses included. For your part, always say you need to consult with the board chair before responding to additional requests. This gives you time to think it over, reinforces the chain of command and provides political cover. Remember, you want a unanimous vote at the trophy ceremony.

- When you have a faxed, signed agreement, you let the board know the terms.
- At the board meeting, which if you timed it right is very soon, you introduce the new administrator and his or her family if possible, to the public and the board.
- The board votes unanimously to approve the contract.
- There are handshakes and smiles all around, as well as press photos and interviews.

Your job is not done: Add the newly hired administrator to your administrative e-mail distribution group and include him or her on all the administrative e-mails. Encourage colleagues to contact the new administrator to talk about transitioning to the new community. You should do the same, opening doors in the district and in the community when necessary and possible.

CANDIDATE RESUME/E-MAIL REVIEW

Total

CANDIDATE # ________________

REVIEWER____

Candidate's Experiences

SEARCH PRIORITIES	4 - Excellent	2 - Average	0 – Not Rated
Communication:			
Written			
Open and Approachable			
Knowledge:			
Budget / Grants			
Scheduling			
Special Education			
Effective Middle School Programs (advisory, Targeted Services, core/non-core areas)			
Best Practice Methods / Instructional Strategies			
Experience:			
Upper Elementary Students (4-6)			
Middle School Students (6-8)			
Behavior Expectations and Discipline			
Technology			
Staff Development			
Leadership / Coordinator			
Vision and Direction			
Supervise and Manage Curriculum			
Community Involvement			
Extra Credit:			
Information Media			
Other			
Other			
Total			

Comments: