



Indicator: The superintendent models and communicates the expectation of improved student learning through commitment, discipline, and careful implementation of sound practices. (5623)

Explanation: A superintendent tasked with school improvement must engage stakeholders in developing a vision and goals that will lead to substantial transformation. Effective superintendents are collaborative as they work with stakeholders to establish non-negotiable achievement and instruction goals, and ensure that research-based practices are used to address these goals. These superintendents also closely and continuously monitor outcomes and provide appropriate resources so that goals can be attained. Effective superintendents are excellent communicators, instruction-focused, visible, and committed to high expectations for all students. They also promote a culture of trust with principals as they establish district staff-school partnerships focused on meeting individual school needs.

Questions: *Does the superintendent work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop non-negotiable district achievement and instructional goals? Is the superintendent able to identify and implement research-based instructional strategies to help schools improve? Does the superintendent model effective data analysis and continuously monitor schools' progress towards goals? How does the superintendent adjust existing resources and/or identify new ones to address school needs? Does the superintendent effectively communicate vision/goals to community stakeholders? Is the message of high expectations for all students consistently and comprehensively communicated? Does the superintendent assume responsibility for improved outcomes, and do principals and district staff believe they operate within a culture of trust with the superintendent? Does the superintendent create district staff-school partnerships that target individual school needs rather than primarily focusing on compliance?*

Superintendents in academically effective school systems are “active instructional managers who take seriously the coordination and control of the core learning mission of schools” (McLeod, Richardson, & Sauer, 2015, p. 105), and superintendents’ instructional leadership is key to determining a district’s academic success (Kowalski, et al., 2011; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Effective superintendents are highly supportive of school improvement and articulate and communicate to the community both a vision and a set of goals and practices that send a clear message of what district schools are to be about (SREB, 2010). In a comprehensive meta-analysis of superintendent research, Waters and Marzano (2006) found that effective superintendents targeted their efforts towards creating goal-oriented districts by assuming responsibility for the following sound practices:

1. **Collaborative goal setting:** Effective superintendents involve all relevant stakeholders (e.g., principals, teacher-leaders, central office staff, etc.) in creating district goals.
2. **Developing non-negotiable achievement and instruction goals:** Effective superintendents establish achievement goals for all schools and student subgroups and ensure that research-based instructional strategies are implemented to achieve these goals.
3. **Ensuring that the school board’s goals are aligned with and support district goals:** Effective superintendents collaborate with their school boards so that board goals do not conflict with district goals and divert attention or key resources away from district goals.

4. **Continuously monitoring progress:** Effective superintendents continually monitor progress towards targeted achievement and instruction goals.
5. **Providing resources (time, money, materials, personnel, etc.):** Effective superintendents make sure that resources are available to accomplish achievement and instructional goals; in some cases this involves scaling back or eliminating initiatives that are not aligned with these goals.

Superintendents that emphasize collaborative approaches and building relationships with internal and external stakeholders have been shown to be effective in promoting school improvement (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012; Kirtman & Fullan, 2016; Thomas, 2016). Effective superintendents also spend time ensuring that staff are focused and working towards the same direction for school improvement, and are instruction-focused by allocating significant time to stimulate, influence and support instructional practices (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016; Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009; Thomas, 2016).

Louis and colleagues (2010) recommend that superintendents and other district leaders are “crystal clear and repetitive when communicating the district’s agenda for student learning” (p. 216). Effective superintendents ensure that all district staff can communicate this message by consistently articulating the message widely to staff and being highly visible within the district. Effective superintendents spend significant time engaged in conversations with staff and community stakeholders (Forner, et al., 2012), and communication skills are essential for promoting the types of transformative changes that are needed for substantial school improvement. Supportive districts also must ensure that vision and goals reflect high expectations for *all* groups of students (SREB, 2010). Research on the California Collaborative on District Reform demonstrated that dramatic changes in expectations frequently are necessary in schools where teachers and staff have become accustomed to persistent low student performance, and that these higher expectations must come from district leadership, including the superintendent and school board (Knudson, Shambaugh, & O’Day, 2011).

District staff and superintendents should also create a culture of trust in which principals trust the central office to provide meaningful support, and make them partners in defining and achieving the goals targeted within the strategic plan (SREB, 2010; Knudson, et al., 2011). This

culture of trust will in part be fostered by district leadership that assumes responsibility for achieving district and school goals, with superintendents and other district leaders explicitly and publicly signaling their willingness to be held accountable for outcomes (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2007). Superintendent leadership that encourages a shift towards a more service-oriented, rather than compliance-based approach to district-school relations can further establish a culture of trust between schools and districts and contribute to school improvement (Honig, 2013; Schueler, Goodman, & Deming, 2017; Supovitz, 2006). As Honig (2013) describes:

“The experience of pioneering districts suggests that transformation should involve creating intensive partnerships between principals and executive-level central office staff, developing and aligning performance-oriented central office services to support district-wide instructional improvement, and establishing superintendent and other central office leadership that will help staff continuously build their capacity for better performance.” (p. 1)

Schools need customized and targeted support from district leadership in order to rapidly improve (The Center on School Turnaround, 2017).

References and Resources

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Resources

For an example of a superintendent evaluation rubric see: http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/model/PartIII_AppxA.pdf

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