

CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE	INDICATOR
Dimension B	Leadership Capacity	The superintendent models and communicates the disposition of innovation and creativity to problem-solve and meet the needs of schools and students. (6831)

**Explanation:** Superintendents in districts that are incorporating personalized learning for school improvement must use collaborative leadership strategies to engage all stakeholders as they attempt to meet school and student needs. This includes modeling and communicating a culture of innovation amongst educators by fostering risk-taking and collaboration to share ideas and best practices as teachers act as researchers to determine what works for students. Effective superintendents must also “walk the walk” by modeling curiosity and using digital tools themselves alongside educators in the district. These superintendents further develop and share a clear vision for how technology and personalized learning will be used while demonstrating their commitment to the vision through their actions and develop strategic plans that incorporate cycles of continuous improvement.

**Questions:** *What evidence does the district have that the superintendent has adopted a collaborative leadership style? How does the superintendent model the use of innovation and creativity through technology within the district? Does the superintendent encourage risk-taking among educators as they incorporate digital tools and implement personalized learning strategies within their classrooms? How does the superintendent collect and share innovative and successful instructional practices? Does the superintendent develop a shared vision but also demonstrate the vision through his or her actions? Does the superintendent foster continuous improvement and encourage “teachers as researchers?” How does the superintendent model collaboration and encourage a “learning culture” through support for educator collaboration?*

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). Superintendents overseeing personalized learning initiatives in their districts must further demonstrate that they have the vision, innovation, and creativity necessary to address and solve problems that inevitably arise when making such a comprehensive shift in instruction and student learning (Demski, 2014; ISTE<sup>1</sup> Standards for Education Leaders, 2012; Levin & Schrum, 2013).

### ***What Qualities and Practices Are Essential for Superintendents Leading Personalized Learning School Districts?***

A recent research-based synthesis defining the policies and practices used by successful district leaders in “future-ready” schools with high levels of technology implementation concluded that a *collaborative leadership* style was the most effective leadership approach (USDE, n.d.). Collaborative leadership in these settings requires a “commitment to demonstrating strong leadership aptitude, developing the vision, securing the ongoing funding, building the district-wide leadership team, and garnering the broad-based support needed to ensure a successful digital learning transition for students and teachers” (USDE, n.d., p. 3). This leadership style includes modeling of technology use and active participation in technology-related professional learning, including by the superintendent. Collaborative leadership also includes

<sup>1</sup> International Society for Technology in Education.



creating a culture of trust and innovation to foster a climate of risk-taking and experimentation, and sharing innovative ideas among teachers and across schools. The superintendent can develop with other district leaders a systematic process for collecting and responding to input from educators on centralized decisions that benefit from scale (e.g., device purchases), while simultaneously trusting schools to make their own localized decisions to meet community needs and local goals (USDE, n.d.). The ISTE Standards for Education Leaders (2012) similarly suggest that superintendents and other leaders “inspire a culture of innovation and collaboration that allows time and space to explore and experiment with digital tools.”

In an interview with tech-leading members of the League of Innovative Schools, superintendents shared their experiences leading these schools. Interviews yielded five “best practices” for leadership which are consistent with other research (Demski, 2014):

1. **Be a learner.** Effective superintendents in these contexts exhibit and exude life-long learning and curiosity. For example:

[Superintendent] Williams uses Twitter to reach out to teachers in his district who have demonstrated new and impressive methods of classroom instruction, and also to learn from the network of educators across the country who populate his feed. He actively models this style of learning by sharing sample tweets with school board members and holding workshops for principals in his district on the effective use of Twitter as a professional learning tool.” (Demski, 2014)

This superintendent advises others not to be afraid of showing that they don’t have all the answers to questions, but demonstrates instead that they are constantly learning and continually seeking answers to those questions.

2. **Have a clear vision, and share it widely.** This vision should be transparent so that everyone is working on the same ideas and can help avoid the spread of misinformation. Research on award winning districts that leveraged technology for school improvement showed that these superintendents demonstrated passion for the vision but then also pursued it relentlessly through their actions, such as reaching out into the community and bringing in new resources through partnerships (Levin & Schrum, 2013).
3. **Be goal-oriented.** Technologically effective superintendents articulate clearly stated measurable and reachable goals. A strategic plan is developed for how technology will be used to improve student learning, implementation progress is evaluated and course-corrections are made, and effective approaches are scaled up. They further communicate effectively with stakeholders, celebrate successes, and engage in continuous improvement cycles to meet the needs of students and schools (ISTE Standards for Education Leaders, 2012; USDE, n.d.).
4. **Collaborate.** Effective superintendents in high-tech school contexts model teamwork by collaborating with community members, other superintendents, and local researchers, and creating a “learning culture” by directly supporting collaboration among educators.
5. **Create a culture of innovation.** Successful superintendents create a culture of continuous improvement as opposed to a culture of control, encouraging teachers to explore and experiment with digital tools as teacher-researchers (ISTE Standards for Education Leaders, 2012; USDE, n.d.). As one superintendent advises:

Identify your teachers who are bringing new ideas into the classroom. Support those efforts. Let folks know that they are allowed to take risks and that you understand that not everything they try will work. Those will be the seeds from which widespread innovation will grow. (Demski, 2014)



## REFERENCE AND RESOURCES

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### Resources

For a district assessment tool and resources for Future Ready leaders implementing personalized learning see: <https://tech.ed.gov/assessment/leaders/>