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Introduction

It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.

—**Niccolò Machiavelli**

The 21st century's change-fraught education environment has large and looming implications for local school boards and superintendents. A sense of urgency is surging around teaching and learning, with all types of education stakeholders demanding, or at least expecting, continuous improvement, ample alternatives, and quick solutions to persistent challenges such as poverty's fallout and limited resources. How are local school boards and superintendents to react to such persistent challenges, especially when immersed in such urgency? John Kotter (2008), a best-selling author and authority on leadership and change, notes, "Urgency is a combination of thoughts, feelings, and actual behavior." In part, this book aims to address the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors needed for school boards and superintendents to function effectively as a team in an environment demanding quick and sustained improvement. Additionally, John Mannes (2015) believes, "Our national conversation on education should include more discussion of effective school system leadership" (p. 23). We hope this book contributes much to that broader conversation as well.

One of this book's main foci is ensuring that each school board–superintendent team provides effective leadership through a deep understanding of each member's role and responsibilities. Much difficulty stems from the considerable position overlap of a school board member and a superintendent. Consider the following list of desirable skills for both a superintendent and a school board member in a local newspaper (see figure I.1, page 2). Many roles and responsibilities for both positions are similar and require common attributes.



Figure I.1: Superintendent and school board member desirable skills.

While the list illustrates the common leadership skills required from both the superintendent and school board member, it also highlights the many demands these same leaders face. School boards and superintendents who address these representative demands together, as opposed to working discretely, greatly improve their odds of successfully working in the complex environment of board governance and district-level leadership. Simply stated, school boards and superintendents will function more effectively as district leaders if they work as a team with common goals, instead of as individual entities.

Local school boards and superintendents must pay close attention to the challenging forces bearing down on school districts or risk losing the citizenry's confidence in their capacity to improve education. A clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and a commitment to thinking and acting strategically will help these individuals counter the pressures and urgency surrounding school district leadership. If local school boards and superintendents are not prepared to lift the mantle of change and to do so in short order, confidence will shift from the local level to state and national levels as the most equipped to successfully address educational challenges. And while Michael Kirst and Frederick Wirt (2009) anticipate the “future

boards' role will remain intact and similar to the past" (p. 154), they also share the belief that local control may give way to increased involvement from higher levels of government. If public confidence is to migrate back to the local level in the future, it is imperative that boards and superintendents function effectively as a team.

Although this book emphasizes the notion of a team, we acknowledge the differences in the school board and superintendent roles and do not recommend that districts force a degree of teamwork that would negate these unique responsibilities. The superintendent's role is one of chief executive officer (CEO), and an elected or appointed school board evaluates and hires him or her. The superintendent generally informs the board's business, which it accomplishes at public meetings. The superintendent has a voice during these public meetings but does not vote. These differences delineate roles and responsibilities, and in some cases, such as with evaluation, it would be unwise to force role and responsibility overlap. We acknowledge differences such as this throughout the book as appropriate, but most content is dedicated to the areas where team potential exists.

The Power of a Team Approach

The relationship between and role of school boards and superintendents has changed over time, accompanying changes in each entity's role and governing style. However, for the most part, boards and superintendents functioned independently of each other, with the result being a quasi-corporate model in which the superintendent was the educational expert charged with ensuring student success and the board governed the district with a responsibility to its electorate. Before 1900, superintendents served as general supervisors to their schools while board members served as the administrative body, attending to things such as coal purchasing to heat the school. From 1900 through the 1930s, superintendents assumed a more executive role and school boards a corporate-style model of governance. By the 1940s, superintendents had become professional educators and school boards set general policy (Tyack & Hansot, 1982), a trend that continued throughout the 20th century (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). As of 2000, boards and superintendents seem to work as a partnership (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). Over time, superintendents and school boards have increasingly shared responsibility for what were distinct roles—ensuring student success and serving an electorate (education stakeholders and community patrons) in a political environment.

Drastic changes in the number of individuals associated with these positions accompanied the changes in the superintendent's and school board's role. Although consolidation began around 1900, there were still over 195,000 school districts in 1917 (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Districts have experienced continually declining numbers since then,

and as of 2017, only slightly over 13,800 districts remain, consisting of approximately 90,000 local school board members (National School Boards Association [NSBA], n.d.). While the rate of consolidation has slowed, a 93 percent decline since 1917 has clearly impacted the nature of the school board and superintendent relationship. School boards and superintendents now serve much larger regions, represent far more constituents, and serve a much larger student population than was the case in 1917. These changes, in addition to 21st century educational reforms (such as high-stakes testing, rigorous academic standards, heightened teacher accountability, achievement gaps around poverty and majority or minority status, and international comparisons) and the negative narrative surrounding education, constitute a challenging environment for most boards and superintendents.

To successfully navigate these demands, the 21st century school board and superintendent relationship must be underscored by a unique partnership that acknowledges role and responsibility overlap. That overlap may create tension between the school board and superintendent; however, this tension is manageable. In this book, we emphasize the *team*. The school board–superintendent team is a leadership and governance imperative if we want to restore trust and confidence in local control for education—the key purpose of this book.

School boards' and superintendents' meaningful voice, strangely, seems largely absent in reform efforts—save for the expectation that they direct resources to support building-level administrators, teachers, and staff. Rather, education reform efforts to date largely focus on the school site. Yet, amidst that emphasis, we maintain no one is better positioned to offer a systems-level perspective on issues of school reform than school boards and superintendents.

We believe the school board and superintendents are key in seeing that everything in the district connects to everything else, and that these connections provide the impetus for sustainable improvement. However, a team effort best supports an effective systems-level view. Without a team approach, school districts may encounter a leadership group in which decisions are made hastily in an environment where some individuals have background information and others do not. Board–superintendent teamwork minimizes the divide-and-conquer dangers of working individually and strengthens both entities. It also improves the status of the team in the eyes of education stakeholders both internal and external to the district. Both benefits reinforce the fact that solo leadership rarely trumps team efforts. Working as a team translates to a more powerful governance and leadership presence, something that is clearly needed in 21st century school districts.

The Need for Systematic Implementation

Anyone who has worked toward personal or professional improvement understands the benefits of implementing a change systematically. For example, if the board–superintendent team prioritizes districtwide continuous improvement, it might consider several steps part of a systematic approach. The team can accomplish some steps, such as vision and mission statement development, more easily than the detail-oriented work of transforming data into useful information. However, the difficulty of creating useful information does not relieve the team from the responsibility of completing this step. Picking select continuous-improvement steps while disregarding others will not yield comprehensive continuous improvement that the team so desires.

Thus, this book intends to provide superintendents, school board members, and school administrators with a systematic approach to building an effective school board–superintendent team. While the recommendations in some chapters are easier to accomplish than others, it is impossible to form an effective leadership and governance team while disregarding some chapters. If a team is further along on some effectiveness measures than others, we recommend using these chapters to affirm its ongoing teamwork before continuing on with the remaining chapters. The following provides brief chapter outlines of the book's two parts.

The first part of the book discusses legal perspectives and teamwork and leadership strategies that should be employed on an ongoing basis to ensure a successful school board–superintendent team. In chapter 1, we examine the importance of effective school governance through a legal lens, including the power and authority afforded a basic governmental unit and how the team can effectively utilize this latitude. Chapter 2 offers strategies for new team member induction and orientation in detail. It describes best practice concepts, with rich implementation ideas for the team. Chapter 3 clarifies who does what and helps teams negotiate the delicate balance of roles and responsibilities to maximize predictability and effectiveness in day-to-day work. The means to communicate effectively as a team is chapter 4's focus, with an emphasis on valuing divergent views and inviting difference to inform a one-voice perspective. Chapter 5 details the step-by-step process leading to informed decision making, whether mundane daily decisions or difficult high-profile decisions. In chapter 6, we focus on providing affirmation opportunities for strong teams and reorientation for weaker teams. We describe a thoughtful process, understanding that team effectiveness and commitment take time and are not achieved in a day or two.

In the second part of the book, we discuss a team approach to the strategic and evaluative functions of school district leadership. We begin in chapter 7 to develop a deeper understanding of how to create core values and beliefs, mission, and vision

statements and to understand their important role in guiding the team's governance for the district. Chapter 8 details a systems approach to strategic planning and continuous improvement. It describes multiple models, acknowledging there is no one-size-fits-all model. Chapter 9 addresses the key elements of approaching change agendas, systematic ways of dealing with change, and the means to create a culture that supports openness to change. Chapter 10 deals with strategies to build the board's collective capacity for negating the behavior of rogue members, as well as the means to minimize bad behavior when it occurs. Then, chapter 11 discusses elements of effective evaluation, with strategies to appraise, analyze, and reflect on the aggregated evaluation data. We discuss multiple types of stakeholder feedback to inform team evaluation. Finally, chapter 12 summarizes the book's main ideas and discusses the future of the school board–superintendent team. Each chapter also includes a professional development activity to help teams instill the concepts each chapter covers and to improve their ability to work together, which we discuss next.

The Importance of Professional Development

Effective school board–superintendent teams pursue professional development regularly. Chuck Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien (2011) evidence professional development as a top effectiveness characteristic when they state, "Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts." We also recognize the value of professional development, especially when approached as a school board–superintendent team. In each of the twelve chapters, we have developed specific professional development activities that contextualize the chapter content in a way that recognizes and values the many board–superintendent team differences that undoubtedly exist. These team-building activities are found directly after the relevant chapter text that they support—some activities are at the end of the chapter and some appear throughout the chapter, depending on the content. The activities should add value and meaning to each chapter topic given the unique contexts of each school board–superintendent team, while strengthening overall team effectiveness.

Professional development, as presented in this book, strengthens team relationships, improves congeniality and collegiality, deepens trust and respect among team members, and enhances individual members' general habits of mind related to team