

## THE SUPERINTENDENT – BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP

The school board and superintendent should treat each other with respect at all times. The actions of the school board and superintendent should provide the public with confidence that the district is being run professionally and in a manner that is consistent with the students' educational needs and the community's desires and aspirations.

If the school board and superintendent make an effort to understand and respect each other's roles, they will avoid unnecessary conflicts. They also stand the best chance of responding successfully to the various issues confronting the district.

### • ***What is the superintendent's role relative to the School Board?***

A "textbook" description of appropriate roles suggests that the board is the policy body and the superintendent is there to administer those policies. In actual practice the distinction is rarely that clear, however, so it is critical that the board and superintendent develop clear expectations of the other and are in full agreement as to how those roles are observed.

The superintendent is the only employee that is hired directly by the Board. All other administrators, teachers, and staff are hired by the superintendent. Where the School Board is responsible for setting the vision and mission for the district, it is the superintendent who will carry out the goals. The School Board tells the superintendent what it wants done; the superintendent determines the best way to do it.

### • ***What documents should I have to help me understand the superintendent's responsibilities in the district?***

Formal documents such as district policies, the superintendent's job description and contract help in defining what the board and superintendent are responsible for. Each of these documents are available for your review. Start with **BP 2120**, Superintendent of Schools and also consider **BP 2122**, Superintendent's Job Description. You should also have a copy of the superintendent's contract explained to you as part of the Board orientation.

Regular board self-assessment and evaluation of the superintendent will help the team continue to examine their respective roles and keep communications open.

### • ***How should the board and superintendent clarify expectations?***

Expectations need to be clarified through ongoing discussion. If there is disagreement about the process or responsibilities take the time to discuss each other's view of what has taken place in the past and determine the future course of action. Review current practice and policies before you get started on your major responsibilities.

Only the superintendent can manage the day-to-day operations of the district, and only the board can identify the expectations for the district through its policies. Boards that micro-manage are working outside of their policy-making role. Superintendents who macro-manage are superseding the governance role of the board.

Roles of the board and superintendent need to be clarified through discussions of the expectations and responsibilities for various tasks. If there is disagreement about the

process or responsibilities, take the time to discuss each participant's perception of what has taken place in the past and what he or she thinks should take place in the future. AASB's Board Standards offer a good starting point for that discussion. Each of the Standards has indicators that define board responsibilities and actions.

• ***How do I communicate with the superintendent?***

You should feel free to communicate in any way you are comfortable. Usually the superintendent is more than willing to meet with you, discuss issues on the phone, or respond by email. The important thing is not **how** to communicate, but that you **do** communicate with the superintendent, especially when you have questions about agenda items being discussed at your Board meeting.

• ***When and how does the Board evaluate the superintendent?***

Boards should evaluate the superintendent each year. Typically the superintendent's contract details the timing of the evaluation. Many Boards use AASB's evaluation protocol. Information about your Board's superintendent evaluation process should be part of the local orientation provided by your Board and superintendent.

• ***How do I approach the superintendent about a concern?***

You can always bring an issue up in committee if the suggestion is part of the business of a committee you sit on. If your suggestion needs to be discussed by the entire Board and voted on, it should be added to an upcoming agenda. You should feel free to contact the superintendent, or the Board president, to discuss your idea and have it either put on the agenda or referred to committee.

If you are tactful and ask thoughtful questions about the way the Board currently operates and why, you will minimize the effect of appearing "pushy" when making a suggestion. If your suggestion relates to how the district operates, you should first ask yourself if you are getting too involved in the operation of the school. Even so, if done tactfully, the superintendent should not mind discussing how the school district functions and be open to new ideas.

Even more importantly, the superintendent will appreciate open, honest and direct communication from you. If you have concerns about him/her or anything going on in the district, establishing a healthy two-way communication whereby you can respectfully discuss differences will go a long way in gaining the respect of your superintendent.

***How should Boards and superintendents establish priorities?***

The board and superintendent should work together to set priorities for the district. Priorities can establish goals for the budget, determine new educational programs, and ensure adequate services are available to students. The board and superintendent should set aside time to define their proper roles within each of these areas. The superintendent acts as an adviser to the board in establishing its priorities. He or she identifies the current needs of the district, suggests a process, supplies information to the board, makes recommendations and develops strategies for implementing the priorities. Boards make the final determination of priorities for the schools.