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TOP 3

SCHOOL BOARD SURVIVAL TIPS FOR NEW SUPERINTENDENTS



Dr. Edward "Lee" Vargas

- Recovering Superintendent
- EVP, AVID

“

The board may not
always be right,
but they are always
the board.”

NEGOTIATE A STRONG PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENT

They never love you like they do when they first hire you.

Your contract with the board should establish the expectational framework.

Define roles, terms, and responsibilities

- Salary and terms
- Board of Education
- Superintendent
- District management
- Personnel management
- Goals and evaluation
- Full legal indemnification

Establish a
communication
system

Focus on
teamwork with
the entire board

Nurture the
relationship

Use state school
board associations,
NSBA, research, etc.
as a framework for
leading the board

**TREAT ALL
BOARD MEMBERS
EQUALLY AND
WITH RESPECT**

Operate from a
policy and
regulatory base

Be the chief
educational advisor
to the board

Understand you can
only take direction from
the board as a whole

Be a steward and
help the board
achieve success



**HAVE AN ESCAPE
HATCH AND A
SAFETY NET**

**DISTRICT, BOARD, AND
SUPERINTENDENT:**

HOW DO WE MEASURE UP?

Effective and efficient processes

Strategic planning and results

Stakeholder engagement

Curriculum and teaching

Stellar people

Accountability

Leadership

CRITICISMS OF SCHOOL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Role
confusion and
ambiguity

Lack of
leadership for
education reform

Poor goal-setting,
planning, and
execution

Board members splintered
by attempts to represent
special interests or board
members' individual
political needs

Lack of balance
between autonomy
and affiliation

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S ROLE

- ▶ Translate board policy into action
- ▶ Effectively execute the board's goals and direction
- ▶ Set high expectations for themselves and others
- ▶ Communicate effectively with every board member
- ▶ Be professional, knowledgeable, and deliberate
- ▶ Gather information to aid board in decision-making
- ▶ Share information requested by one board member with all board members
- ▶ Provide regular assessment data to board
- ▶ Work to achieve the district/board vision

THE SCHOOL BOARD'S ROLE

- ▶ Hire the superintendent
- ▶ Establish a vision and long-range plan
- ▶ Identify problems and issues
- ▶ Set board policy
- ▶ Offer counsel and advice
- ▶ Evaluate district progress toward goals
- ▶ Delegate and hold the superintendent accountable for executive functions

EFFECTIVE

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

- ▶ Communicate honestly, directly, and respectfully with each other, the superintendent, and all constituents
- ▶ Understand respective roles
 - ▶ Board does the “what”
Superintendent does the “how”
- ▶ Work as a TEAM
(Together, Everyone Achieves More)
- ▶ Visit schools to learn, not to manage
- ▶ Listen and refer concerns to the superintendent
- ▶ Represent parents while maintaining professional objectivity

EFFECTIVE

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

- ▶ Are optimistic and believe in what they are doing
- ▶ Support board decisions while retaining their individuality
- ▶ Have an investment in education
- ▶ Are consistent and reliable
- ▶ Place students at the center of all decisions
- ▶ Follow their own policies and state/federal regulations

EFFECTIVE SUPERINTENDENTS

- ▶ Are open, honest, and trustworthy
- ▶ Coach and support their boards as they struggle to set goals and make policy decisions
- ▶ Maintain state-of-the-art knowledge
- ▶ Help make the board successful
- ▶ Accept responsibility for outcomes
- ▶ Are professional at all times
- ▶ Most importantly, communicate—the good, the bad, and the ugly

Focus on
students in
decision-making

Have open, honest,
respectful
superintendent-board
relationships

Are “1” team

Understand the action
is in buildings and
classrooms

**BOARD-
SUPERINTENDENT
TEAMS IN
HIGH-ACHIEVING
SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

Understand and focus
on school and school
system renewal

Use data and
information for
decision-making vs.
practice and tradition

Promote an elevating
vs. accepting belief
system
(raise expectations)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Do you agree with B.H. Krysiak?

Krysiak writes:

“A productive and effective board-superintendent relationship is all about being able to adapt to different situations. The relationship demands flexibility based more on knowledge and expertise than on roles etched in granite.”

What area of school board-superintendent relationships does your school district need to work on most?



THANK YOU

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