

Preparing for Success: A Year-Round Plan for Superintendent Performance Evaluation



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Evaluating the performance of the superintendent is critical to the improvement efforts of the entire school district.

Thirty years of research on effective schools indicates leadership is second only to classroom instruction in influencing student outcomes.¹ Given what's at stake, it's imperative for boards of education and superintendents to work together to establish an effective plan for performance evaluation.

While most board members have a keen understanding of the significant role the superintendent plays within the district, it's not uncommon for some board members to feel uncomfortable about formally assessing the performance of a trained, well-educated professional. William Nemir, Director of Leadership Services for the Texas Association of School Boards with more than 30 years of experience working with boards and superintendents, explains, "Board member dread is usually a sign that the board's evaluation process is not fully developed—that the board and superintendent have not done the necessary 'up-front' work at the beginning of the process."² Fortunately, communication and planning are key to overcoming both board member hesitancy and crafting a quality performance evaluation process.

ASPECTS OF EVALUATION

A well-planned evaluation process defines performance expectations, enhances communication, aligns efforts of the superintendent to district goals, supports the board of education in holding the superintendent accountable for improving student achievement and, last but not least, identifies areas where professional growth is needed.³

PERFORMANCE

The performance evaluation of a superintendent should be objective, ethical and linked to district improvement.⁴ At the beginning of the evaluation cycle, the board and superintendent should work together to establish specific, realistic and measurable performance expectations for the superintendent that are aligned to the goals of the school district.

COMMUNICATION

While planning for superintendent evaluation, the board and the superintendent should clarify what, how, when and with whom communication should occur. This includes articulating expectations for routine

communications, as well as those that pertain directly to performance evaluation such as check points, formal evaluation and communications to the public. Thought should also be given to how the results of the formal performance evaluation will be communicated to the public.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

It's important to keep in mind that evaluation is, at its core, a developmental process. Superintendent professional development should support performance outcomes. Even experienced superintendents want to continue their professional development in order to effectively deal with the demands and complexities of the job.⁵

PLANNING FOR EVALUATION

PREPARING TO PLAN

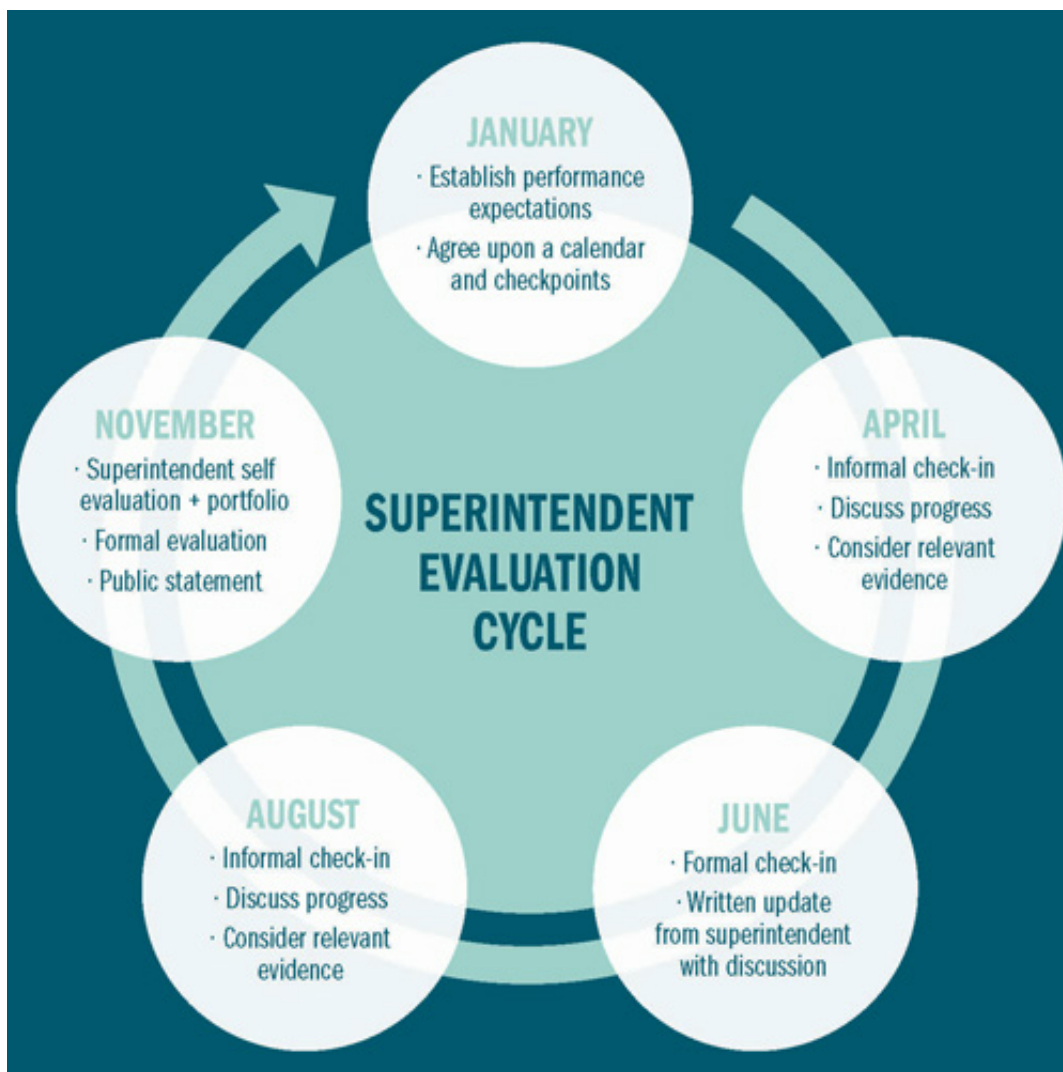
When preparing to lay out a plan for evaluation, board members should review the superintendent's employment contract, his/ her job description, the district's strategic plan (or at least the district's goals), school board policies and professional standards such as the Educational Leadership Policy Standards.¹ It's also a good practice to ask the superintendent to provide samples of the evaluation tool he/she is recommending.

MECHANICS OF PLANNING

Boards and superintendents should come to agreement on the following points when building a plan for meaningful evaluation:

- Evaluation instrument to be used
- Details of process to be used
- Who will be involved and in what aspects of evaluation
- Schedule for evaluation (Put in on the calendar!)
- District goals
- Superintendent performance goals
- Indicators (evidence) of performance

In addition to scheduling time for evaluation planning, boards should schedule multiple opportunities for informal and formal check-ins. (See figure below.)



PLANNING THE CYCLE

Many factors should be considered when planning the evaluation cycle—chief among them is the election cycle of school board members. Adopting a superintendent evaluation cycle that begins in January and culminates in November ensures continuity in that most of the same board members will be involved in both setting expectations and evaluating performance toward those expectations.

SUMMARY

Establishing an effective plan for superintendent performance evaluation requires thoughtful, thorough work on the part of boards of education. While annual evaluation may feel like just another mandate from the state, boards of education that invest time and diligent effort into building a meaningful superintendent performance evaluation process will realize a terrific return on that investment in the form of improved outcomes for the district and, most importantly, the students.

Sources:

¹ Council of Chief State School Officers. Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC, 2008.

² Illinois Association of School Boards. The Superintendent Evaluation Process Strengthening the

Board-Superintendent Relationship, 2014.

³ Iowa Association of School Boards. The Superintendent Leadership Performance Review: A Systems Approach, Created with cooperation from the Wallace Foundation, 2008.

⁴ Kowalski, T. Critiquing the CEO. The American School Board Journal, 185, 43–44, 1998.

⁵ Berg, J., & Barnett, B. The school district superintendent: Attention must be paid. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA., April 1988.