

Grading Your Superintendent

It's the time of year again when boards are required to evaluate the CSA

By JOANNE BORIN

The exercise of evaluating your superintendent is one of the most important responsibilities a school board has. It's also a legal requirement: boards must perform such an evaluation by April 30 of each year.

The board can govern when it knows its superintendent's goals and accomplishments. The superintendent can manage when he or she knows what the board expects.

By establishing a clear set of expectations, the board can conduct a positive and effective evaluation. That evaluation should include an updated job description; the superintendent's goals and objectives; the instrument the board will use to measure performance; and a policy outlining the evaluation process. The board and the superintendent should discuss and agree to these procedural steps in advance.

The Process Properly evaluating the chief school administrator (CSA) involves having the board establish goals and objectives, clarify how to accomplish the goals, review progress reports on a regular basis and hold the CSA accountable for progress towards those goals and objectives. With these components, the evaluation becomes a tool to help the board fulfill its responsibility to govern the district.

As noted, the board has a legal responsibility to evaluate the CSA. The evaluation is also required by the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC). In addition, the New Jersey Administrative Code requires boards of education to annually evaluate tenured and non-tenured superintendents.

The code identifies the following responsibilities of a board of education: (1) adopt policy and procedures for the evaluation; (2) develop job description and evaluation criteria; (3) determine what

methods of collecting data will be used; (4) prepare an individual plan for professional growth and development; (5) conduct an annual summary conference between the CSA and a majority of the board; and (6) prepare a written performance report with input from majority of the board

A comprehensive evaluation of a superintendent has three components: Progress towards District Goals and Objectives; Evaluation of Leadership Skills; and the board's self-evaluation.

Progress Towards District Goals and Objectives To determine what progress a superintendent has made in reaching certain goals and objectives, it helps to follow this step-by-step guide:

Step 1 The board, in cooperation with the superintendent, establishes the goals and objectives which the superintendent is expected to accomplish.

Step 2 The superintendent takes those objectives and, with the administrative team, develops an action plan for each objective. The superintendent also establishes the time frame for achievement.

Step 3 The superintendent brings the action plans back to the board. The board directs the superintendent to implement the plans.

Step 4 The superintendent provides the board with progress reports. Target dates for the major activities serve as the schedule for progress reports. Sometimes progress reports will indicate the need for a "course correction." This ensures that plans stay on target, rather than waiting until the target has been missed and then trying to determine why it was missed.

Step 5 Finally, the board must determine if it is satisfied with the progress made toward the goals and objectives. Sometimes a CSA

will have only partially achieved the goals or not achieved them at all. The superintendent's responsibility in such instances is to provide a satisfactory explanation as to why this occurred. The board must judge whether the reasons given for not meeting the objective are satisfactory.

Evaluation of Leadership Skills While the board's primary concern should be whether the superintendent is making progress towards district objectives, the board will also want to consider the leadership style of the superintendent. A superintendent's effectiveness is, in large measure, related to the character of his or her leadership or management skills. No one style is best for all. Expectations vary from district to district, and are best served by different approaches to management.

NJSBA's Evaluation of Leadership Skills instrument provides the board with an effective evaluation tool. This helps to make certain that all aspects of the job (as identified by the job description) are being performed, not just those highlighted in the goals. It can provide an opportunity for the board and the superintendent to assess perceptions of how the superintendent is performing, particularly when clear examples are used to explain the ratings.

The Evaluation of Leadership Skills instrument mirrors the job description, provides clearly designated and limited categories, and requires comments to explain and highlight the ratings.

School Board Self-Evaluation The board's credibility will be enhanced if the board includes, on an annual basis, an evaluation of itself. This practice is now required to be completed annually by NJQSAC. As part of the management team, the board and its superintendent are cooperatively

and mutually accountable for the progress of the school system. This process requires board members to rate themselves as team members and as individuals in the following areas: planning; policy; student achievement; finance; board operations; board performance; board /superintendent relationships; board/staff relationships; and board and community relationship.

NJSBA's Revised Evaluation Instrument In order to assist boards with the task of evaluating the superintendent, NJSBA has developed a revised evaluation instrument. The evaluation is composed of two parts: Progress Toward District Goals and Objectives and Evaluation of Leadership Skills.

Part 1, Progress Towards District Goals, is based upon the district's goal setting. It directly links the action plans developed by the administration to the evaluation document.

Part 2, Evaluation of Leadership Skills, incorporates those elements of job performance typically found in the district's job description, as well as those

skills deemed most effective in assuring optimal management of a school district. The component areas include: general responsibilities, instructional leadership, personnel administration, financial management, chief executive officer, and school/community relations.

Both parts together provide the data for the formal evaluation document – a narrative outlining progress towards goals, strengths, and areas that require improvement.

NJSBA is introducing a new, online superintendent evaluation instrument this year. Board members will log on to the NJSBA Web site and electronically fill out the evaluation instrument. Once all board members have completed the forms, the results will automatically be tallied, and a report will be compiled for the board's field service representative. There is no fee for this service. The online evaluation is more efficient for both boards and NJSBA. Previously all forms had to be compiled and results tallied by hand, a process which could take a few weeks.

Boards can still complete paper copies of the CSA evaluation instrument, but will have to compile the results themselves. For information on the online evaluation process, or to obtain a copy of the paper evaluation instrument, call your Field Service Representative.

The board's relationship with its superintendent is critical to his or her performance. A good relationship is founded on common understanding, mutual respect and trust. Maintaining trust requires a systematic and continuous flow of information between those governing the district and those managing implementation of governance decisions.

Where trust exists, the evaluation program can help to maintain it. When problems arise, it may help to remedy them. A positive and effective relationship between the board and the superintendent helps foster student success. **sl**

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