



EVALUATING

the

Superintendent

What does it take to do it right? | *Louis J. Birchbauer, Ph.D.*

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he task of evaluating the superintendent is not usually a high priority for most school board members. So board members should ponder this question: What do you hope to accomplish by evaluating the superintendent?

I know there are many answers to the question. In fact, I usually hear responses like: legally we must complete an evaluation; the administrator's contract calls for an evaluation; we are having concerns about performance; school board policy requires an evaluation; and/or

compensation adjustments should be tied to a performance evaluation.

These are legitimate reasons, but it is my belief that continuous improvement for all employees through a formal evaluation process really drives the engine of student achievement. Improved student achievement is truly what most school board members want for their school system. The superintendent is the key employee that the school board evaluates and sets the tone for continuous improvement in a school system.

An evaluation process for the superintendent requires a focused vision that takes time, planning, two-way communication, and more discussion than just once per year.

A school board understands that getting everyone on the same page is not easy work, but it's worthwhile when making tough decisions. As you read this article, you will be able to see the various elements in an evaluation process that require planning, deep thought, serious conversations, and the importance of

regular time intervals devoted to the superintendent evaluation process.

■ Required by Law

According to Wisconsin state statutes, the school board is responsible for evaluation of the superintendent of schools. School boards are required to ensure the evaluation of licensed personnel during the first year of employment and at least every third year thereafter.

The written evaluation shall be based on a board-adopted position description, including job-related activities, and shall include observation of the individual's performance as part of the evaluation data. Boards should also use the Wisconsin Leadership Standards as the district's framework for the evaluation (see sidebar, "7 Standards").

When planning for the evaluation, it is recommended that you address your local dynamics: the job description, school board policy, and individual employment contract timelines. This task will identify the date when the evaluation needs to be completed locally and you can compare that date to contract renewal dates provided in Wisconsin State Statute 118.24 (6) and (7). Presuming a June 30th contract expiration date, the goal date for completing the yearly written evaluation should be mid-January (in most cases). This date will facilitate annual compensation decisions or, in necessary cases, a time frame for addressing employment separation.

■ Developing an Evaluation Document

The task of developing an evaluation recording document to facilitate conversation and communication takes more time. The recording document/written evaluation is where the school board works on focusing its vision of performance expectations by referencing the position description, special goals, and local initiatives.

One easily overlooked aspect on this document is leadership control for an expectation. Simply stated, the school board needs to analyze and evaluate each expectation under the microscope of the leader's span of control as: "Direct Control," "Direct Influence," "Indirect Influence," or "Beyond Leader's Control." The actual control levels vary based on the size of the leadership staff and organizational structure. However, a true analysis of control levels will make it easier to set improvement goals and future performance expectations.

School board members can make it easier to facilitate evaluation con-

versations by including a rating scale and timeline into the evaluation cycle. The preparation of the written evaluation document for the employee's personnel file, which is a public document, reflects the majority position of the school board. A rating scale, which can facilitate worthwhile communication among school board members, is identified below:

- **"Needs Development"** — Some aspects of the superintendent's performance are satisfactory, but other particular aspects of the performance are not as well developed as they should be and therefore the performance

GOALS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION PROCESS

- Meet statutory obligations,
- Address school board policy,
- Incorporate elements of the employment contract,
- Identify a process to secure focused feedback,
- Use multiple opportunities to secure informal and formal feedback,
- Address local dynamics,
- Create an environment of continuous improvement, and
- Create a meaningful dialogue among school board members on expectations.

7 STANDARDS for Administrator Development and Licensure

Wisconsin Educator Standards — Administrators

- The administrator has an understanding of and demonstrates competence in the Ten Teacher Standards.
- The administrator leads by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared by the school community.
- The administrator manages by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to pupil learning and staff professional growth.
- The administrator ensures management of the organization, operations, finances, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
- The administrator models collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
- The administrator acts with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
- The administrator understands, responds to, and interacts with the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context that affects schooling.

Source: Wisconsin Administrative Code PI 34.03



generally falls somewhat below the desired level of satisfaction. *Note: If you use the Needs Development level for ranking, you are to provide an explanation in the “Supporting Evidence or Comments” area.*

- **“Meet Expectations”** — The performance of the superintendent is generally adequate, satisfactory, and acceptable. Some aspects of this performance may be especially strong but not sufficiently strong to make the rating of total performance outstanding.
- **“Outstanding”** — Some aspects of the total performance are adequate and satisfactory, but

there are other aspects that reveal outstanding performance and perception, and therefore the performance of the task is, in general, especially noteworthy and commendable. *Note: If you use the Outstanding level for ranking, you are to provide an explanation in the “Supporting Evidence or Comments” area.*

- **“Don’t Know”** — The board (or school board member) simply does not know if this activity has been engaged in.

■ Drive the Conversation

It is recommended that school boards include quarterly informal evaluation discussions as part of the evaluation process. These conversations create

an opportunity to talk about performance, receive feedback from the superintendent, change direction, and view performance modifications to address concerns or directional change based on local dynamics.

Quarterly discussions also provide school board members with an opportunity to express observational information closer to the time of the observed performance and secure feedback from the superintendent about a concern with additional information about the observation.

The evaluation discussions should take place in closed session using provisions of Wisconsin State Statute 19.85 (1)(c). A suggested evaluation cycle includes quarterly evaluations as:

- **Quarter One** — Informal with the superintendent present,

SAMPLE EVALUATION FORM

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR/SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION ANALYSIS WORK FORM		Date:			
School District:	Span of Control	April Months: Jan-Feb-Mar	July Months: Apr-May-Jun	October Months: Jul-Aug-Sep	January Months: Oct-Nov-Dec
Standard — Key Indicator / Attribute					
Two: The administrator leads by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared by the school community.					
A Wisconsin Superintendent will have knowledge about and demonstrate skill abilities to:					
Use a collaborative process for developing and implementing a vision for student achievement.	DC or DI	ME			
Communicate and take action to achieve vision.	DC	ME			
Facilitate and engage in activities that promote increased student achievement in a diverse school community.	DC	DK			
Develop plans to monitor program development and implementation to achieve district goals.	DC	ND*			
Communicate effectively to stakeholders regarding progress with school improvement plan goals.	DC or DI	ME			
COMMENTS: Q1 — As a school board member, I have not seen any monitoring of our mathematical improvement goal.					
Semi-Annual Session — Standard Two (Optional: individual rating scale: _____)					
NOTED Achievements or Comments — Standard Two (semi-annual session)					
Annual Session — Standard Two (Optional: individual rating scale: _____)					
NOTED Achievements or Comments — Standard Two (annual session)					

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This is one page of a sample superintendent evaluation form. Elements of the superintendent’s job description are in red type. The superintendent’s span of control is noted in the first column (DC = Direct Control, DI = Direct Influence, ID = Indirect Influence, and BLC = Beyond Leader’s Control). In the next column, the superintendent is given a grade (ND = Needs Development, ME = Meet Expectations, O = Outstanding, and DK = Don’t Know).

It is suggested that all school board members have their own copy of the form to record their own observations and notes for later dialogue — first among school board members and then with the superintendent.

Let the WASB Help

The WASB can assist a school board in design and implementation of a superintendent evaluation system in your school district.

For more information, contact Lou Birchbauer at 414-218-2805 or lbirchbauer@wasb.org.

- **Quarter Two** — Informal with the superintendent present,
- **Quarter Three** — Informal with the superintendent present, and
- **Quarter Four** — Formal without the superintendent present.

The fourth quarter evaluation (without the superintendent present) forms the basis for the written evaluation. The evaluation is ultimately shared with the superintendent after the school board majority agrees on

its position and direction for the written evaluation. The superintendent should be provided an opportunity to respond to the written evaluation before it is officially placed in the employee personal file.

Sometimes the school board may find it necessary to complete a semi-annual written evaluation to address major changes in direction due to local dynamics or issues in the operation of the school system.

■ Completing the Evaluation

The final aspect of the superintendent evaluation process is to respect confidentiality until the written document is completed. It is very easy to make a mistake here, so the school board needs to be very careful.

Each school board member should record their comments on their respective evaluation form — do not share or exchange the personal evaluation form with anyone. The school board

should devote time at a closed session meeting to verbally share their responses and reach a consensus on each standard with respect to comments so a singular directional comment is provided to the superintendent in the written evaluation. The rating and comments are intended to provide the superintendent with feedback recognizing successes and direction for improvement. School district leadership can then confidently focus efforts on student achievement in a directed and approved fashion.

Wisconsin school boards are currently operating within an environment of high accountability for student learning. The superintendent evaluation process is one element of accountability that boards will find meaningful to improving student learning. ■

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