



NEW SUPERINTENDENTS TIPSHEET

Avoiding Common Mistakes

The number of new superintendents is on the rise, the job itself is quite old. Over time education professionals have found certain practices work and others do not. The list of “dos” and “don’ts” could easily be the subject of a book, or two. THE COUNCIL has compiled some of the more compelling ‘common mistakes’ to avoid for those beginning one of the most exciting and challenging careers available.

1. UNSHARED VISION

Vision developed prior to district or experiences, that had little basis for fact in new district. There is a need for “purposing” or forging a shared covenant, i.e., people who pose impediments like “status quo” must be shown the light.”

2. TOO MUCH TOO SOON

Trying to address all the perceived problems right away - need to learn the local culture and discover problems of change.

3. PROMISES, PROMISES

Making hasty commitments early on and not being able to come through later, lack of adequate information or research—this mistake causes real CREDIBILITY problems.

4. OFFENDING SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Lack of information, partial board notified, political board ties to staff, creating unrealistic expectations, failing to pick up on the nuances of a board vote with a consistent pattern, etc.

5. NOT DOING HOMEWORK BEFORE BOARD MEETING

Failure to bring along reluctant or uninformed board members or surprises or introduction of new ideas at board meetings. Need to talk to them about day to day issues.

6. POWER POLITICS

Need to learn where various pockets of power are within the school district. Special interest groups with a single interest, i.e., music, athletics, board members have special constituencies of their own - be aware of them to engage total community.

7. FICKLE LOYALTIES

Do not attach to a “certain group” - understand and do not criticize the past. Must develop loyalties from ALL groups.

8. FAILURE TO IDENTIFY PROBLEMS

Do not allow things to progress as they were if board expects a new direction must provide a level of leadership that demonstrates competence to identify problems and to move toward other solutions.

9. BLUNT TALK

Do not misread the past, most people in an organization often “like it like it is” appraisal can be too “harsh” and offend”.

10. ALONE AT THE TOP

The superintendents position is isolated work - need to learn to focus on one issue at a time, practice time management, allocate time and identify issues that can be delegated. “Spinning the plates,” can be a result of poor time management.

11. HAZARDOUS HOUSE CLEANING

Personnel issues must be handled without bias and evenhanded to avoid “mistrust”.

12. OVERLOOKING THE OBVIOUS

Failure to do homework to gain support - research the issues to gain support.

13. HIGH COST OF SAVING MONEY

Projects are too time consuming when you do them yourself instead of getting outside help.

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