

# AASB BOARDMANSHIP SERIES



## SELECTING A SUPERINTENDENT

FOURTH EDITION  
2013



ALABAMA ASSOCIATION  
OF  
SCHOOL BOARDS

*Developing Excellent  
School Board Leaders*



**AASB**  
**BOARDMANSHIP**  
**SERIES**

**SELECTING A  
SUPERINTENDENT**

*FOURTH EDITION  
2013*

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## FOREWORD

Selecting a Superintendent is one of the booklets in the Alabama Association of School Boards' Boardmanship Series. The series was conceived to provide school board members with additional information on specific issues related to education governance that are not addressed in detail in other AASB publications.

This booklet provides general guidelines for conducting a superintendent search. It is designed to give readers an overview of the myriad issues confronted in a search and a broad understanding of the legal requirements involved. This booklet is not intended to provide legal advice for specific situations. Moreover, employment law is fairly dynamic, and changes in statutes, state law and regulations could affect the general guidance provided in this handbook. Accordingly, AASB recommends that school boards consult with their board attorney before and throughout the selection process.

## INTRODUCTION

*Rarely are two superintendent searches exactly alike. Each board must decide which procedures are best suited to the circumstances in its community.*

Selecting a superintendent is the most important task a school board undertakes. Board members who have been through a search describe the experience in mixed terms: tough, exciting, challenging and enlightening. Indeed, the process can be almost overwhelming if the board does not have a plan for the steps to be taken.

School boards that have had to find a new superintendent have found it essential to develop a systematic selection plan. Careful planning can eliminate most of the arduous aspects of a search and even lead the board and community to a shared sense of excitement in finding a new educational leader for the school system and the community.

This booklet is designed to help Alabama school boards establish a plan of action for selecting a new superintendent. It is essential to remember, however, that rarely are two superintendent searches exactly alike. Situations differ from one community to the next, and each board must decide which procedures are best suited to the circumstances in its community.

## TIMING IS EVERYTHING

*Alabama law requires the board to post the superintendent position for 30 days and allows the board to appoint an interim superintendent for up to 180 days.*

When the board first learns the superintendency will be vacated, the common reaction is to fill the position quickly. The thought of operating without a chief executive officer is cause for concern. However, moving too quickly – and possibly selecting the wrong person or overlooking well-qualified candidates as a result – is more alarming.

The board should set a target date for the replacement to take office. Within 90 days of a vacancy occurring, Alabama law requires school boards to announce, in a regularly or specially called meeting, a proposed process and timeline for posting and selecting a superintendent.

Alabama law also requires the board to post the position for 30 days and allows the board to appoint an interim superintendent for up to 180 days (*see page 9*).

Ideally, four to six months should be allowed for making the critical decisions that will lead to a good match between the selected superintendent and the school system's needs.

If only a short notice is given, it may be desirable to appoint a suitable interim superintendent to allow more time for the selection process. If the board must appoint an interim superintendent, it should select someone who will not be a candidate for the position to avoid giving the interim an advantage over other candidates. Timing is everything – don't rush or shortcut the search.

## TAKE STOCK

*Decide in advance what qualifications the new superintendent should possess. Solicit community input on desirable qualifications.*

While never easy, selecting a new superintendent is easier if the school board decides in advance what qualifications the new leader should possess. Selecting a superintendent is an opportunity to chart your school system's future. The board should take stock of the school system's needs, problems and goals. It may choose to talk with community leaders, parents, students, teachers and staff to get their ideas on desirable qualifications.

If the board does solicit community advice on the desirable qualifications of a new superintendent, it should do so in a manner open to the public and communicated through the media. For example, the board could use a regularly scheduled board meeting to solicit comments from the community about a prospective superintendent.

If the qualifications are part of board policy, the board should make sure it



abides by its policies and state law governing policy adoption. The board also should discuss changes and new directions needed in the system and qualifications the new superintendent should have to provide the leadership required to make the desired changes.

The fruit of these discussions can guide the board toward the type of search to pursue.

## **TO SEARCH OR NOT TO SEARCH**

*Don't go through the motions of a search if the board's desire is to promote from within the school system.*

The best match for the school system's needs may be an administrator within the system. If so, the board should decide whether to consider other candidates. A note of caution: Don't go through the motions of a search if the board's desire is to promote from within. To do so, could potentially anger both the candidates and the community, wasting two valuable resources — money and time.

State law requires you to advertise the position for 30 days even if the board plans to appoint an internal candidate.

If a search is in order, consider its scope. The board can limit the search to the state or region or can search nationwide.

## **ESTABLISHING QUALIFICATIONS**

*Check board policy for any specified attributes that the superintendent must possess. Set high standards but don't be overly selective.*

All city superintendents and more than half of the county superintendents in Alabama are appointed by their local school boards. Appointed and elected county superintendents are required under Alabama law to:

- Hold an Alabama certificate in administration and supervision (through the alternative certification process, the board can request a waiver for prospective superintendents from the state Board of Education regulations requiring eligibility for proper state certification);
- Have three years of experience as a teacher, principal, supervisor, educational administrator or instructor in school administration during the previous five years;
- Hold a degree from a recognized four-year college or university; and
- Be knowledgeable of administration.

The law does not require city or county superintendents to live or be a registered voter in the city or county in which they are employed.

For city superintendents, state law requires only that they hold a degree from a recognized four-year college or university and be knowledgeable in

school administration. But city boards will want to establish a list of desirable qualifications that go well beyond these minimum legal requirements.

Before setting qualifications, boards should check to see if they have a policy already in place specifying what attributes the superintendent must possess. Both city and county school boards may establish qualifications higher than the minimum requirements set by law. An important board responsibility in filling a superintendent vacancy is to determine the full qualifications necessary to meet the community's educational needs. These qualifications should become the criteria used in screening statements of interest and interviewing candidates.

Among the qualifications to consider are: administrative experience, educational background, leadership style, ability, willingness to work with diverse community groups, financial management skills and communication skills. The board also should decide whether it will require or give preference to candidates holding an earned doctorate and whether it prefers previous experience as a superintendent or administrator in a school system of a particular type or size. It should be made clear from the beginning if the new superintendent is expected to reside in the community.

When establishing qualifications, keep in mind qualifications that are too restrictive could exclude many good candidates. While the board should set high standards for superintendent candidates, the goal of the search is to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Such qualifications as specifying three years of systemwide experience could exclude some excellent candidates such as school principals. As much as possible, the qualifications should apply to individuals with a broad range of experience.

## CONSULTANTS

*If the school board doesn't have the search expertise, time or resources to conduct a superintendent search, consultants may be a viable option.*

When faced with the task of finding a new superintendent, some school boards decide to conduct the search themselves. But most board members never have experienced finding a new superintendent, and inexperienced boards often make mistakes that later can cause some troublesome problems. Also, the search process entails much attention to detail and demands a large amount of time. For these and other reasons, many boards employ consultants to help them in the selection process.

A consultant service is particularly helpful if a statewide, regional or nationwide search is desired. Using a consultant who guides the board through the search process can help a board avoid liability for employment discrimination. If a consultant is used, it is wise to check references and, once you've chosen a consultant, to draw up a contract that specifies the consultant's responsibilities and the board's duties.

A search directed by consultants is usually more thorough and may attract a wider range of candidates for the board's consideration. More importantly, consultants can screen candidates according to the board's criteria, relieving the school board of the burden of reviewing a mountain of documents. A consultant also can protect the integrity of the search, ensuring against information "leaks" to the public and to the school system staff.

The school system's budget may dictate whether a consultant will be used, though most consultants will adapt their services to fit the board's needs and budget. When comparing the cost of a search conducted solely by the board to using the services of consultants, the board should consider whether there are sufficient and appropriate personnel to develop brochures and place advertisements and whether the board has the time to screen initial statements of interest.

Generally, it is not advisable for the central office staff to be involved in any aspect of the search aside from routine clerical duties. Candidates' files should not be kept at the central office. If there are several viable local candidates, school system personnel could be placed in compromising situations if they are assisting the board with the search or have access to candidates' files.

Board members, particularly those who are employed, might not have the time or staff resources to devote to the many administrative details of the search.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

*A wise board takes a proactive position by involving stakeholders and seriously considering their advice.*

There are two precepts to follow when involving community and other groups in the selection of a new superintendent: Make it clear that the final decision rests with the board and genuinely consider the recommendations given by those you've involved in the process. Staff members, parents and the community will welcome the opportunity to participate in such an important task but can become angered if their efforts are taken lightly.

The board should consider its past record with community advisory committees. If the board has worked harmoniously with committees in the past, it may be worthwhile to appoint a committee reflecting the numerically significant and distinct groups in the community to suggest qualifications the new superintendent should possess.

Another option to involve the community in the process is to schedule an informal gathering for the public to meet each candidate interviewed. The gathering should not be formal (soft drinks and cookies would suffice). And the public – particularly parent group representatives, business leaders and employees – should be encouraged to attend.

Whether or not the board solicits suggestions from the community, staff and students, it will likely get plenty. A wise board takes a proactive position

by involving these groups and seriously considering their advice. But the board must retain its authority to make the decisions, including the final decision on the candidate to be appointed.

## **ANNOUNCING THE VACANCY**

*Post the vacancy at least 30 calendar days before the position is to be filled and keep it posted until the position is filled*

Once the board has decided to conduct a search and developed a timeline, qualifications and procedures, it should formally announce the vacancy.

The vacancy announcement can also be made through news releases; letters;

### ***The Interim Superintendent Position***

The law does allow the board to appoint an interim superintendent for up to 180 days after the vacancy occurs. However, the board is not required to advertise the interim position.

If a new superintendent is not named within 180 days of the vacancy, the state superintendent must withhold the school system's state funding until the board shows it is making a good faith, reasonable effort to select a new superintendent.

### ***The Media***

Face this fact right away: The media will be keenly interested in every step of the selection process, and they will demand to be informed. Set the tone for communicating with the media early in the search by being open and candid about the entire procedure. This will help enlist the media as allies rather than adversaries.

To control the flow of information on the search, many boards have found it useful to appoint one person to serve as a spokesperson for the board. The spokesperson should brief the media when the vacancy is announced. The announcement is a good opportunity to outline the search procedure (including anticipated length, whether a consultant will be used and qualifications). Also, make sure the media are aware of the steps the board takes to involve the community in the selection. If a special community panel is named, let the media know who the members are.

An open rapport with the media throughout the search can help to create a positive public perception of the process.

However, state law also gives the public, and therefore the media, the right to demand certain information related to the search. For example, if the board conducts a search without the aid of a consultant or screening committee, the media are entitled to know who all the candidates are. Thus, if appropriate, candidates should be advised in writing that their interest in the position might be disclosed publicly. Candidates should acknowledge in writing their understanding that their interest might be made public.

brochures; advertisements in professional education publications; online job posting sites; professional social networks maintained by various education agencies; and email to administrator associations, colleges of education and other superintendents.

Take special care to ensure widespread distribution of the announcement, especially to institutions and organizations which historically may be associated with one race or gender. In all cases, the announcement should note the school board is an equal opportunity employer.

While some school boards announce superintendent vacancies through letters, a brochure should be strongly considered as an important component of the search process. A brochure does not have to be costly and may be distributed electronically rather than in printed form. However, it should be produced professionally.

A well-written, attractive brochure that describes the community and school system sells the school system to potential candidates and portrays the community as a desirable place to live and work. The brochure may attract candidates who might not otherwise apply based on a vacancy announcement.

Under Alabama law (Section 16-12-1 and 16-9-11), city and county school boards with appointed superintendents have 90 days after a vacancy occurs to announce the process and timeline they will use to fill the position. The announcement must be made in a regular or called meeting.

### ***Announcing an Elected Superintendent Vacancy***

Superintendent searches are somewhat different in counties where the superintendent is elected. These boards' opportunities to appoint superintendents occur when a superintendent vacates the position after taking office. The events leading to the vacancy likely are unexpected and possibly unpleasant, and the board has a limited amount of time to find a replacement.

Alabama law requires that the school board appoint a successor (interim or permanent) within 180 days of the vacancy occurring. Within 90 days after the vacancy, the county board must announce in a regular or called meeting the proposed process and timeline for posting and selecting a superintendent. Notice of the superintendent vacancy must be posted in a noticeable place at each school campus and worksite at least 30 days prior to filling the position.

If the board appoints a superintendent to fill the vacancy, the successor will hold the office for the remainder of the unexpired term. If the board fails to appoint a successor, the state superintendent of education – if unconvinced the board is working in good faith to make reasonable progress toward selecting a superintendent – will withhold state funding until the vacancy is filled.

If the vacancy occurs before the elected superintendent takes office, a special election is set by the governor to elect a successor. The qualifications for the appointed or elected successor are the same as for appointed or elected county superintendents (*see page 6.*)

At a minimum, the board also must post notice of the vacancy for 30 days and the notice must include:

- Job description and title;
- Required qualifications;
- Salary range;
- Information on where to submit an application and the deadlines for applying; and
- Any other relevant information.

The notice must remain posted until the position is filled. Willful and substantive violation of the requirement to post the various notices voids any action the board has taken regarding the hiring of a superintendent.

## SCREENING THE CANDIDATES

*The criteria set by the board should be the basis for screening and recommending candidates to interview.*

The letter or brochure announcing the vacancy should indicate the deadline date for applying. After that date, it will be necessary to screen applications, check references and decide which of the candidates will be interviewed by the board. If the board has employed a consultant service, it may want the consultants to screen the applicants and recommend a preset number for the board to interview.

The criteria set by the board should be the basis for screening and recommending candidates for board interviews. As further discussed in the section titled “Interview Gaffes,” candidates cannot be screened on the basis of age, race, gender, religion, national origin, pregnancy or physical disability. If the board chooses to screen candidates, it should consider using a rating instrument like the one discussed in “The Interview” section.

The references and backgrounds of the selected candidates should be checked before they are recommended to the board for interviews. Up to this point, if consultants are used, the names of candidates should be held in confidence. *When the names of recommended candidates are placed before the board, however, their names and application files must be public under state law, and the candidates should be so advised.*

The reports of the consultants must be delivered in an open board meeting. The recommendations should be made in alphabetical order without ranking. The board should proceed promptly to interview the recommended candidates, reserving its right to review all applications and, if necessary, re-open the search.

Usually the board interviews three to five candidates. If the board desires to do so, it may ask the consultants to recommend a larger number of candidates and select from that list. However the selection for board interviews is made, the number should be limited so the board can give each person the time and attention required for a comprehensive interview.

## THE INTERVIEW

*All board members should be involved in the interview, which is the most critical step in the selection process.*

The interview is a critical step in the selection process since the board's final decision likely will be based on information and impressions gathered there. But the candidate is not the only one being interviewed. Just as the board is interviewing several candidates, the candidates may be considering several positions. Therefore, the board should use the interview to create the best possible image of its schools, the school system and itself.

The board president should contact the candidates to invite them for an interview as soon as practical. Preferably, interviews should be completed within a one week timeframe.

The board should be prepared to pay the expenses of the candidates and their spouses. All board members should be present for every interview if possible. In the event a board member has an unavoidable conflict, a video recording of the interviews should be made. An audio recording would be sufficient if video equipment is not available or is impractical. Even board members who have participated in the interviewing have found the recordings useful to review.

As a courtesy to the candidates, the board should provide materials in advance of the interview that will give them an accurate picture of the school system's conditions. Such information items should include: a copy of the school system budget; the latest annual report or general information brochure; and an administrative organization chart.

Regardless of the format used, all board members should be involved in the interview. Many experts suggest that board members pose questions that address specific problems within their school system. Other suggestions are:

- Use scenario-based questions that present hypothetical situations asking how the candidate would respond;
- Ask experience-based questions that help determine how a person actually has handled a responsibility;
- Pose open-ended questions that require thoughtful responses;
- Keep the questions pertinent to the board's objectives; and
- Avoid questions designed to embarrass the candidate.

During the formal interview, all candidates should be asked essentially the same questions. In addition, make sure important questions are covered (*see page 14*). Perhaps each board member could ask questions from areas of her or his special interest. For example, a board member with a particular interest in special education could present questions regarding that area, while a member more concerned with fiscal management could ask questions regarding financial matters.

It is equally important to allow the candidate to ask questions of the board. A good candidate will want to know as much about the school system as the board wants to know about her or him.

In addition to formal interview questions, board members may gain additional insight about the candidate through informal dialogue.

The board should consider the interview process carefully. And once it sets its course, implement the process consistently. The interview usually provides board members with your best information on the candidates. To enable you and your peers to compare and contrast the abilities and experiences of each candidate after the interview, consistency in the interview process is crucial. For example, if you take one candidate out to lunch, make every effort to do the same for all candidates. Informal discussion over a meal can provide an opportunity to get to know candidates on a personal level, which is not possible in other settings.

In addition, it is helpful for each board member to use a rating instrument. These instruments, at minimum, should be used during the formal interview. A variety of formats are adaptable, and they can be as simple as recording a number or letter to indicate the response to each question is acceptable, unacceptable or excellent. This is known as a structured interview. Its goal is to require board members to document their assessment of specific candidate responses or comments. For example, if in response to a question on raising student achievement, a candidate relates a successful program he or she implemented that resulted in an increase in students' achievement test scores, a board member could rate the response as excellent.

While such ratings are for each board member's use, they also can help board members document their decision-making process if the board's selection process is challenged legally.



### ***Sample Questions for a Successful Interview***

At least five broad areas –board/superintendent relations, fiscal management, curriculum and student achievement, personnel relations and personal assessment – should be addressed by the potential superintendent, in addition to other topics the board deems important. Below are examples of questions relating to these topics:

- How would you keep the board informed about what is happening in the school system?
- What would your reaction be if the board disagreed with a policy you believed to be educationally sound?
- If the system's budget were prorated by 10 percent, how would you determine the budget cuts to be recommended?
- What elements are essential for an innovative educational program?
- What major curriculum trends do you feel have merit? What curriculum changes have you made in your present position?
- What attributes do you think are most important in a teacher?
- How do you handle complaints from principals, supported by comments from parents and students, about a teacher's performance?
- What do you consider to be your greatest administrative strengths? Weaknesses?
- Why are you interested in this position?



## *Interview Gaffes*

Just as there are important topics interview questions should cover, there are specific areas where it is unwise for the board to probe. Questions which reveal age, gender, marital status, credit history, arrest and conviction records, and military discharge status may violate equal employment provisions under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations. Pre-employment questions about physical and/or mental conditions may violate the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Though such questions are not necessarily forbidden, the school board should determine whether the answers, if used in selection of the superintendent, could have a disparate effect in eliminating from consideration minorities and/or members of one gender. Boards also should be certain the information the questions seek is necessary to judge candidates' competence and qualifications.

Review publications available from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on pre-employment inquiries. In addition, your board attorney should review in advance the questions or topics you wish to pose to candidates.

Generally, it is advisable to avoid questions relating to:

- Marital status, number and age of children, childbearing and child care plans. This information often is used to discriminate against women or single parents.
- Age. The state and federal Age Discrimination in Employment Acts protect persons in the 40 to 70 age bracket.
- Ethnicity. Both citizens and non-citizens in the U.S. are legally protected from employment discrimination. However, Alabama law prohibits employment of illegal immigrants.
- Arrests and convictions. Courts have held that arrest records often are used to discriminate against some minorities, and a candidate's conviction record may not always be used to eliminate a candidate. The board should take into consideration the candidate's age at time of the offense, its seriousness and other mitigating factors.
- Military record. Questions regarding military discharge may violate Title VII. As a result, these type questions are best avoided.
- Personal data. Questions about height, weight, children's school attendance and memberships in organizations may violate Title VII.
- Physical and/or mental conditions. Employers generally cannot ask disability-related questions or request that a medical examination be conducted until after a conditional job offer has been made. The answer to such questions prior to a conditional offer of employment could be used to eliminate the candidate from consideration. However, employers may ask candidates if they can perform specific job functions and to demonstrate how they would perform these duties.
- Religious beliefs. Questions related to religious beliefs or practices could be the source of a discrimination complaint. The Alabama Religious Freedom Amendment provides broader protection for religious beliefs and practices than does federal law.
- Other. Questions regarding educational background and English proficiency are allowable if needed to determine the candidate's competence for the superintendency.

The ratings provide a basis of documenting the board’s decision as opposed to individuals’ recollections, provided board members’ actions coincide with those ratings. The board attorney should collect and save these candidate rating instruments – and all other documents related to the search process – for at least two years after the selection of the new superintendent is publicly announced.

## THE FINAL SELECTION

*The board’s discussion and vote to extend a candidate the job offer must take place in a public session.*

From the initial interviews, the board should be able to narrow its choice of candidates to one or two. The decision to narrow the field of candidates should be based on the needs of the school system and the candidate’s abilities to assist the board in reaching its goals for the school system. These decisions cannot be made on any constitutionally prohibited grounds (*see pages 12-16*). Rather these decisions should be based on the strengths of each candidate in relation to the school board’s goals. It might be helpful for each board member to make a list of the perceived advantages of each candidate for superintendent. Reference to your interview ratings at this stage can ensure your recollection of each candidate is objective and based on her or his responses to the interview questions.

Once all questions related to the character and good name of the top candidate(s) are discussed in executive session, the board should try to reach agreement leading to a unanimous vote to extend a candidate a job offer. The board’s discussion and vote to extend that offer must take place in a public session. The candidate should receive the offer by phone call, confirmed by letter, and the offer should be followed by negotiation of terms of a contract to be signed upon official appointment by the board. Because Alabama law requires a criminal background check on new employees with unsupervised access to children, it is a good idea to make the offer contingent upon a satisfactory background check.

## NEGOTIATING THE CONTRACT

*Legal counsel involvement in contract negotiations helps assure salary, employment conditions, state requirements and more are covered.*

When a board appoints a superintendent, it enters into a contract whether formal or informal, precise or vague. A well-defined contract clearly outlines what the board expects from the superintendent and what the superintendent expects in return. With its expectations stated, the board should have no difficulty later evaluating the superintendent’s performance.

Contract negotiations on both sides often involve legal counsel to assure that

state requirements, employment conditions, salary, fringe benefits and duties are covered.

While the annual salary usually is the most significant item in the compensation package, other forms of direct and indirect compensation have become increasingly important. Types of compensation now appearing in superintendents' contracts are:

- Guaranteed salary increases subsequent to the initial salary based on performance and/or longevity.
- Income protection and retirement, including: term life and disability insurance, tax sheltered annuities, payment of superintendent's required contribution to the retirement system, buy-back of out-of-state experience in retirement system, and deferred compensation or annuity.
- Travel and other expenses, including: mileage or provision of automobile, reimbursement for official and professional travel, payment for memberships in civic and professional organizations, and expense allowance.
- Vacation, personal, sick and sabbatical leave.
- Reimbursement for moving and relocation expenses.
- Professional consulting days. Other contract provisions commonly included are required periodic physical examinations, residence in the community, provisions for evaluations, terms of contract renewal and termination procedures.

## ANNOUNCING THE SELECTION

*A special board meeting might be the best forum  
for announcing the board's selection for superintendent.*

Depending upon the size of the school system, a special board meeting might be the best forum for announcing the board's selection for superintendent. Larger school systems might choose to introduce the superintendent first to the administrative staff, then to the community through the media.

No matter the approach, the announcement of your school system's new chief executive should not be taken lightly. Every word in the board's announcement as well as the new superintendent's response will be scrutinized by the media and stakeholders – school system employees, parents, business leaders, students and other community members – who are greatly interested in what the superintendent's intentions and plans are for the school system.

A new superintendent can be exciting, reinvigorating and, for some, a source of uncertainty. A change in guard can be downright frightening when a school system is already in flux, facing a crisis or when the past superintendent's departure was under duress.

Naturally, just about everyone will be curious about the board's selection. Have a practical public relations plan for not only announcing the new superintendent's

selection but also publicizing key aspects of the selection process along the way (from the launch of the search and selection of finalists to the interviews and final choice of a new school system leader.) The plan should have as its goal the creation of a positive atmosphere for the impending transition.

A school system's public information officer may recommend another course of action for making this key announcement, but the suggested process below gives boards without access to a PIO a starting point.

- **Begin with the best choice.** No amount of PR will mask the selection of the wrong candidate for such a vital position. The board should hire well enough to know and communicate why the chosen superintendent is a fit for the school system and community and is otherwise right for the job.

Be ready with a well-written, detailed biography and a short summary of the superintendent finalists' qualifications and background. The biographies and summaries should also paint a picture of the candidates as well-rounded people by listing family, interesting hobbies, civic involvement, public service, etc.

- **Invest in quality visuals.** Photographs and videos send a message and make an impression, too. Have a high quality head-and-shoulders photograph of the new hire on hand that presents him or her as a polished, confident professional.

For media interested in writing lighter lifestyle features on the superintendent, have a slightly relaxed, but appropriate, photo that expresses friendliness and personality (such as a casual family portrait).

The photos will be requested and used often, so they should display well in color, black and white, online, on TV and in print.

Video of the board's public announcement may also be useful as a social media or website posting or for media looking to add depth to their online articles.

- **Consider the audience.** Write an announcement that targets employees, parents and students and write a general news release that targets the community and media. Consider how you will inform major constituent groups, such as education officials, elected officials, partnership groups and major vendors.

In your announcement and news release, note the superintendent's qualifications, background and the board's confidence in her or his ability to lead the system. Neither the board nor incoming superintendent should imply that the superintendent can work miracles or solve all the system's problems. Don't make comparisons to or pejorative comments about the new superintendent's predecessor. The announcement and news release should be confident, optimistic and realistic and should convey the successor's ability to do the job well. The underlying message in the announcement and news release should be memorable and concise.

Since your stakeholders receive information in different ways, make your content available for others to use. For example, you can submit the incoming superintendent's photo and news release for use in individual schools' newsletters, in PTA emails, on the local chamber's website, in the student newspaper and so on.

- **Act in a timely manner.** Not only do you get one chance to make a first impression, but you have a limited amount of time to make that impression before others do in this fast-paced world of citizen journalism. The system's announcement and news release should be drafted early and be ready to distribute as soon as the board chooses its selection. Just update the announcement and release with the selected superintendent's information and a brief statement from the board's spokesperson (usually the board president). Send the news release quickly to the media and key stakeholders via email, social media and, if media request it, fax.

It's not recommended for the finalists to be present when the board makes its announcement. But be forewarned. The board and superintendent finalists should expect media to request an interview with the incoming superintendent and board spokesperson after the announcement, especially in large media markets.

- **Promote any related events.** The announcement and news release may allude to upcoming opportunities for stakeholders to interact with the new superintendent, such as a welcome reception in the incoming superintendent's honor or a news conference on or near the superintendent's first day on the job. The school system's public information officer may coordinate these events.

The new superintendent will have ideas about how she or he would like to be introduced to stakeholders and staff, which may include school tours, a community address, a discussion with parents and students, a roundtable with the superintendent's cabinet, a meeting with school system employees, a meet-and-greet with the board and locally elected officials or some other event. These events help build momentum and excitement around the new superintendent.

- **What to expect after the announcement.** Expect a thirst for information. The newly hired superintendent, for example, has to give notice to her or his previous employer. News outlets and social media enthusiasts, particularly those in the superintendent's hometown, will be reporting this.

If the selected superintendent had negative news coverage in her or his past, it may be dredged up, so be prepared with positive responses that refocus the message on how the superintendent's skills and abilities match the school system's needs and goals.

Expect the media and community members to eagerly anticipate the superintendent's plan for achieving school system goals and to address challenges. Any major action the superintendent takes in her or his first year, the board-superintendent interactions and the superintendent's ability to hearten the community will be under a microscope. Therefore, it is important to invest early in a healthy board-superintendent relationship and to widely and promptly disseminate reassuring news and information to the community.

## THE TRANSITION

*Help the superintendent transition smoothly.*

Though the superintendent has been hired and announced to the public, the board's work is not finished. Assist, where possible, with relocation of the superintendent and her or his family.

Finally, the board should strive to support the superintendent and demonstrate faith in her or his administrative ability. The board's confidence can be demonstrated in several ways:

- Provide clear policies detailing the superintendent's responsibilities.
- Allow the superintendent to handle administrative duties without board interference.
- Direct complaints, statements of interest and other matters to the superintendent except when those matters are an appeal of the superintendent's decision.
- Keep the chain of command clear by encouraging system employees to communicate directly with the superintendent or appropriate administrator.

When a school board commits its best efforts to the selection of its superintendent and reinforces the selection with its full support, the process is a proud accomplishment for all.

## SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR A SUCCESSFUL SEARCH

### **Immediately**

- Name an interim superintendent if necessary because of death or disability of superintendent or short notice of resignation.

### **Phase One**

- Decide whether to select new superintendent from among current administrators or conduct a search.
- Decide whether board will conduct a search itself or will employ a consultant service to advise and assist the board. Establish the steps for the selection process and the approximate dates for completing each step.
- Decide how to involve staff, students, parents and the community in the selection process.
- Determine the qualifications to be used as criteria in screening statements of interest and selecting the new superintendent.

### **Phase Two**

- Prepare, post and distribute announcement of vacancy, including procedures for applying (see page 9).
- Solicit applications for the vacancy.
- Respond to inquiries about the vacancy and selection procedures.

### **Phase Three**

- Receive applications.
- Train board members on non-discriminatory selection techniques.
- Notify applicants if required materials are missing.

### **Phase Four**

- Screen applicants and check references.
- Select candidates to be interviewed by the board.

### **Phase Five**

- Interview the candidates.
- If necessary, conduct a site visit to the community of the top one or two candidates.
- Conduct second interview with finalists, if necessary.
- Make final selection and negotiate contract terms.

### **Phase Six**

- Appoint the superintendent at an official board meeting and approve contract at subsequent board meeting.
- Notify unsuccessful candidates.
- Arrange occasion for staff and community to meet and welcome new superintendent.

### **Final Phase**

- Assist the new superintendent in relocating.

## ABOUT AASB

The Alabama Association of School Boards' mission is to develop excellent school board leaders through quality training, advocacy and services. Alabama's school board interests are represented nationally through AASB's participation in the National School Boards Association ([www.NSBA.org](http://www.NSBA.org)). Since 1949, AASB has served education leaders and promoted responsible local-level decision making in public education. By pooling resources, AASB members receive a wide range of valuable, cost-effective benefits, including:

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Online courses members can take anytime, anyplace, and at their pace.

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- Features eight core leadership courses: Roles and Responsibilities Orientation; Effective Boards and Relationships Orientation; Financial Accountability; Developing a Highly Effective Staff; Academic Achievement; Creating the Optimal Learning Environment; Policy and Planning; and Community Engagement
- Hours earned ultimately lead to the Master School Board Member designation
- Training for whole boards include: Data First for Governance, Communicate in Style, Boardmanship 101, Conflict Resolution, Board Self-evaluation, Strategic Planning, School Finance and more
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