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Building Great School Board–Superintendent Teams: A Systematic Approach to Balancing Roles and Responsibilities

By Bradley V. Balch and Michael T. Adamson

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Building Great School Board–Superintendent Teams: A Systematic Approach to Balancing Roles and Responsibilities* by Bradley V. Balch and Michael T. Adamson. *Building Great School Board–Superintendent Teams* shows school board members, superintendents, and school leaders how to systematically maintain strong school board–superintendent teams.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

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Chapter 1

Legal Perspectives and the Case for Local Control

1. Why did the founders of the United States not mention education in the U.S. Constitution? What kind of educational system did they want to avoid, and what system did they have a strong commitment to?
2. Consider the authors' analogy that dress codes exemplify the exchange of freedoms that occurs when part of a sovereign state is part of a commonwealth. Describe another school situation that exemplifies such an exchange.
3. What actions does your board–superintendent team exercise to show that it values all individual voices and considers all points of view before making a decision? How could it improve its practices in this area?
4. What legal cornerstones may board–superintendent teams consider to help make sure they make effective decisions that meet minimal expectations for legal scrutiny when facing student- and adult-related issues?
5. Why may it be wise for board–superintendent teams to hire sound legal counsel instead of relying solely on building relationships with the patrons they serve? Provide an

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example of a case at your school when it may have benefited your team to seek legal counsel.

Chapter 2

Induction and New Team Member Orientation

1. According to the National School Boards Association, how long does it take for a new board member to feel comfortable as a board member, and when can a board operate at full effectiveness? How long did it take for you to feel comfortable in your role as a board member, and what led to your comfort?
2. What orientation programs does your district have in place for new board members and superintendents? What suggestions would you have for strengthening this orientation program?
3. At a minimum, what items should a school board member orientation program agenda include? Who are the ideal people to personalize a basic orientation program for a specific school, and why is this the case?
4. What basic skills can all new superintendents benefit from, and why are these skills critical, no matter a specific superintendent's responsibilities?
5. What purposes do the activities Two Truths and a Lie and the Truth Seat serve, and what benefits do they reap?

Chapter 3

Team Members’ Roles and Responsibilities

1. Recount a case in which awkward governance or unnecessary conflict arose between your school board and superintendent because of overlap between their roles and responsibilities.
2. List questions that are representative of *who does what* questions that boards and superintendents may ask as part of their ongoing conversation about team members’ roles and responsibilities.
3. What simple question can help more readily determine the resolutions for potential authority disagreements?
4. Why are school board members’ roles those of governance oversight instead of management?
5. Engage in the professional development activity on roles and responsibilities with your team members. What do you learn from your honest and open discussion on who does what among team members?

Chapter 4

Effective Communication and a Unified Voice

1. Why do the styles of leadership communication and management communication differ in their purpose and usage, and how do these communication styles differ?
2. In your own words, describe *charismatic communication* and why teams should use it with caution. Describe a case in which someone at your school used charismatic communication in an engaging way, as opposed to a self-serving way.
3. What two categories are board communications divided into, and in what situations do these communications occur? In what situations should a school board appoint an official spokesperson, and why is this the case?
4. Why do school boards need to agree on and adhere to a consistent meeting protocol for their regular public meetings?
5. What varied communication methods do school districts have at their disposal? Under what circumstances does your district use each of these methods, and why do you use these communication methods in these cases?

Chapter 5

Team Decision Making

1. Outline the line of authority or hierarchy within a school district. How does this line of authority relate to the flow of accountability in decision making?
2. What three questions do data-driven decisions raise?
3. What is an agenda packet, and why is it vital for superintendents and board members?
When should it be delivered for board consideration, and in what manner should board members review administrative recommendations and share questions about the packet's supporting material?
4. How do the meaning of *compromise* and the meaning of *consensus* differ? Which is the more desirable decision-making method, and why is this the case?
5. What four common issues arise when a team seeks to reach a firm and effective decision?

Chapter 6

Committed and Effective Team Leadership

1. In your own words, define *team*. What three factors determine team commitment and effectiveness?
2. List the ten qualities of an effective team leader and the seven actions that can help build effective team relationships. What makes someone a *visionary* and a *people person*? Describe someone you know who exemplifies the qualities of a visionary or of a people person.
3. Why should great teams ask questions and listen more than they speak? What question prompts can team members use to effectively interact with each other and other stakeholder groups?
4. What seven strategies should teams consider to make sure they successfully deepen team commitments and improve team effectiveness?
5. Consider the sample code of conduct and codes of ethics provided in figures 6.1–6.3 (pages 79–84). How do these compare to your school’s code of conduct or ethics?

Chapter 7

Foundational Statements

1. Define *foundational statements* and the purpose they should serve. Provide an example of a foundational statement you see pop up throughout your school district.
2. What are core value and belief statements, and what overlooked benefit can core values have? Provide a few examples of core value and belief statements that apply to your school district's values.
3. How do mission statements differ from vision statements? Why do the authors believe each individual school in a district does not need its own distinct mission statement?
4. How do the authors define a *vision statement*? Take a mental trip to the future of your school district. What do you see?
5. What do you learn about what makes your school district's culture unique from completing the professional development activity on developing foundational statements?

Chapter 8

Continuous Improvement and Quality Assurance

1. For what reasons may a focus on continuous school improvement seem daunting? Why are school boards and district-level leaders often absent from school reform initiatives?
2. Define a *bounded systems approach*. Why are bounded systems important, and why should a district maintain this approach to its continuous improvement?
3. What must people recognize in order for them to become systems thinkers? Why can school board–superintendent teams develop a strong understanding of the importance of systems thinking, and why should they lead in terms of systems thinking?
4. What do you consider your district’s points of pride? Which of the two valid and reliable bounded systems of continuous improvement the authors suggest do you think would best bind your points of pride together? Why do you think this bounded system is more appropriate?
5. Briefly describe the components of SMART goals, which help set quality goals and plan strategically.

Chapter 9

Governance and Leadership During Change

1. Recount a situation in which your team prepared for change and embraced it or in which you dealt with change as a team even though individual team members had differing opinions on how the team should approach the change.
2. What is a change event, and how does it relate to a transition? Why does a transition take longer and pose more of a challenge than a change event?
3. What perceptions impact whether a change is perceived as a first-order change or a second-order change? Describe a situation that some of your team members considered a first-order change and some team members considered a second-order change, and consider why these differences of opinion occurred.
4. Briefly describe what happens during each of the six stages of change motivation.
5. What kinds of responses may a school board–superintendent team have to change initiatives, and when do these kinds of responses mostly occur?

Chapter 10

Dysfunctional Teams and Rogue Members

1. For what reasons do teams sometimes get assigned the label of *dysfunctional* too quickly?
What characteristics of dysfunction make a school board–superintendent team dysfunctional?
2. What are the essential attributes of every team, and what team elements show that an effective team has successfully adopted these attributes? Which of these attributes or elements do you think your team should work on, and how do you think you can strengthen these attributes?
3. How does an administrative team function when it operates by groupthink? How can teams overcome groupthink? Describe a situation in which you witnessed or took part in groupthink and what perpetuated this behavior.
4. What attributes do rogue school board–superintendent team members often have, and what attributes do teams often identify as rogue behavior but that are not necessarily indicative of a rogue member?

5. Briefly describe the two possible containment strategies that school board–superintendent teams may use to deal with a rogue member.

Chapter 11

System Evaluation Essentials

1. For what three reasons should school board–superintendent teams use evaluation to report and communicate organizational activities?
2. What does *alignment* mean in the context of a school board–superintendent team, and what does it aim to commit district resources to?
3. What kinds of representative data indicators may teams use for student performance data, school-level data, and district-level data?
4. In what six steps can school board–superintendent teams engage in an inquiry cycle that helps them evaluate their actions and make data-based changes?
5. List the components that might be helpful for creating a verbal or written report that communicates the results of an evaluation.

Chapter 12

The Future of the School Board–Superintendent Team

1. According to Daniel R. Davies and Fred W. Hosler, what is the challenge of board membership, and what is the challenge to the board?
2. How can school board–superintendent team members maintain the effectiveness of their team? What do you do to maintain your team’s governance and leadership, and how would you alter these tactics to better maintain the team’s viability?
3. In your own words, define a *leader* and what leadership represents for a school board–superintendent team.
4. What considerations will influence and shape future school board–superintendent teams?
5. Complete the professional development activity on the future of the team. What do you envision for your team’s present status and the future functionality you hope the team has?