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E-Leadership, Counseling and Training



Victor C.X. Wang

Volume III

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Victor C.X. Wang
Florida Atlantic University, USA

Volume III

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Chapter 46

Leadership Characteristics of the Ideal School Superintendent

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the characteristics of the ideal school superintendent based on research findings. Research has seen that the challenges to American education have become more complex with the advent of each decade of this century. The effective school superintendent of today and tomorrow must be a principled, empathetic visionary who is able to lead by facilitating and to actively encourage the development of others. While inferences may be made from the efforts of apparently successful superintendents, research is needed to scientifically validate excellence and to differentiate between superficially apparent success and long-term effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership Characteristics of the Ideal School Superintendent

Like CEOs in large business organizations, school superintendents are hired to efficiently and effectively operate the systems in their charge. Likewise, a superintendent is expected to demonstrate characteristics of effective leadership (Berg &

Barnett, 1999; Brewer & Marmon, 2000; Carifio & Hess, 1987; Hoyle, 1989; Morton, 1990). Reporting directly to the school board, the superintendent is primarily responsible for the operation of the administrative staff, the compilation and execution of budgets, and the maintenance of communication facilities (Smith, 1982). The superintendent is also responsible for implementing the school board's policies. Although these responsibilities are managerial, superintendents play a significant role in formulating district policy. Using their professional expertise and resources, effective

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superintendents can provide school boards with accurate analyses of problems and can lead boards in making thoughtful, informed decisions. Above all, the superintendent should be an educational leader (Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992; Klauke, 1988).

Effective educational leadership is most clearly needed when politics enter into the superintendent-board relationship. Analyzing this relationship, Salmon (1992) sketched four types of boards and discussed typical situations in which superintendents might become entangled. The two most common types, *sanctioning boards* and *factionated boards*, are discussed below.

A *sanctioning board* thoroughly reflects the values of a homogeneous community. Consequently, a strong sense of trust between the superintendent and board members develops. Such boards function primarily as their superintendent's interpreters to the community, explaining and defending their joint decisions.

A *factionated board* is made up of individuals who hold strong and conflicting perspectives on such major controversial issues as busing, taxes, and the nature of basic education. These members reflect their community's divergent views, thus making effective leadership even more important. Salmon (1992) pointed out that the increasing complexity of education and the evolving nature of modern America's pluralistic society has led to a decrease in the number of sanctioning boards and a rise in the number of factionated boards. To deal effectively with a factionated board, the superintendent must develop strong personal qualities and communication skills (MacCoby, 1990).

BACKGROUND

Leadership Qualities and Skills

Toth and Famer (n.d.), in their report on a 1997 survey of West Virginia school superintendents, defined leadership style as "evidenced by a

specific leader is a combination of task-oriented behavior and people-oriented behavior" (p. 4). What are the qualities and skills that characterize effective leadership style? Generally speaking, superintendents are expected to demonstrate all of the qualities found in other good supervisors (Ellis & Dell, 1986). They must be empathetic and understanding; and they must exhibit unconditional positive regard, congruence and genuineness (Carifio & Hess, 1987). Any leader who has employees to supervise is in a relational position. The relationships should be goal-oriented, constructively monitored, open, trusting, supportive and collaborative (Carifio & Hess). Hoyle (1989) asserted that these essential traits would not change substantially even in the next century. Hoyle listed the skills he considered most desirable for a 21st century superintendent in three categories: human skills, technical skills and conceptual skills. Human skills included behaviors that exhibited respect for self and others, high tolerance for ambiguity, a preference for using persuasion rather than coercion and a well-developed sense of humor (Morton, 1990). Technical skills included ability to use a broad range of instructional strategies—such as microcomputers, satellite link-ups, and interactive television. Effective superintendents possess a willingness to think broadly about the educational mission, including community education and education for the industrial and corporate labor force; and they must demonstrate a well-developed ability to communicate effectively through writing, listening and speaking.

Conceptual skills dealt with the appropriate and balanced use of reason and intuition. The superintendent should have a broadly defined sense of how the school system works holistically and an ability to express himself/herself creatively in defining the district's educational vision. To define an educational vision for a district, a superintendent needs substantial leadership abilities and a strong commitment to a collaborative work ethic (Beckner, 1990; Freeman, Underwood & Fortune, 1991; Hoyle, 1989; Kirby et al., 1992).

To better understand exactly what school boards looked for in prospective superintendents, Anderson and Lavid (1985) surveyed school boards that had appointed new superintendents. These 60 school boards listed three areas as "most important factors" for hiring their superintendent: (a) communication skills and knowledge; (b) previous experience; and (c) interest in district personnel and programs. The boards also indicated that candidates' personal grooming, manner of dress, and physical and mental health were fairly important. In addition, candidates' motivation for seeking the superintendency was an important factor in determining candidates' zest for the job. On the other hand, a candidate's age, marital status, previous salary, awards/recognitions, research and religious preferences were deemed unimportant.

Boards could benefit from a study of how an individual's personality affects his/her leadership style. In an early study of leadership styles, Batlis and Green (1979) found that personality attributes correlated to leadership styles. Leaders who were both people-oriented and task-oriented were generally somewhat traditional in their leadership styles. They preferred to make decisions with other people, functioning as the no-nonsense setter-of-goals and priorities. They were cautious and moderate, given to analysis rather than emotions. On the other hand, leaders who were less likely to balance people and task orientations demonstrated sensitivity, introspection, unconventionality and independence. These traits often described younger, less experienced supervisory personnel.

Drawing from literature on leadership theories and developmental psychology and from studies in educational administration, Mazarella and Grundy (1989) concluded that educational leaders were slightly more intelligent than non-leaders. The leaders tended to be more extroverted and cooperative and to exhibit better communication skills than did their counterparts. They took initiative and possessed a strong sense of personal security. Because they were proactive, they were not bound

by strict interpretations of rules but were willing to make compromises to accomplish goals.

Leadership Qualities

Because a leader's demonstrated commitment to team goals and processes often translated into efficiency and effectiveness, Glassman and McAfee (1990) inferred that effective superintendents created effective districts. Employing multiple case analysis methods, Jackson and Crawford (1991) compared three superintendents from school districts with improving student performances with three superintendents from school districts with non-improving student performances. From a fairly extensive literature review, Jackson and Crawford extrapolated seven attributes that characterized the actions and attitudes of the superintendents of the effective school districts. These attributes were examined as they applied to the six superintendents they studied.

Effective school districts had formal district goals that emphasized student learning. The superintendents in those districts reported that they used system-wide staff development programs for teachers (Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987). They established formal and systematic staff evaluation systems that tied criteria to the accomplishment of district goals. The superintendents in effective districts frequently revised evaluation instruments to align with district goals and instructional models (Cuban, 1984; Eller & Carlson, 2009; Murphy, Hallinger, Petterson, & Lotto, 1987; Wallace, 1985; Wilmore, 2010).

Jackson and Crawford (1991) cited Cuban's 1984 study and pointed out that when superintendents emphasized learning outcomes and principals' accountability for district goals and when they revised evaluation instruments to reflect goals changes, principals realized their job security was linked to attainment of goals. Cuban's contention was supported in the literature through reports that superintendents in effective districts terminated ineffective principals and teachers (Jacobson,

1986; Murphy et al., 1987). The literature stated that effective district superintendents were highly involved in curriculum and instruction and that they maintained central control over curricular decisions (DeYoung, 1986; Hallinger & Murphy, 1982; Vickery, 1988).

These and other studies have assisted researchers in identifying the qualities and practices of effective superintendents. However, as some investigators have noted, recent studies have been narrowly focused. Large-scale investigations are needed to form a definitive profile. To widen the scope of inquiry, the perspectives of major stakeholders—parents, students, teachers and the community—must be included. Further, several complex relationships need exploration. Perhaps the most basic are the linkages involving students in educational leadership programs, superintendents and school boards (Myers, 1992; Wilmore, 2008, 2010). Significant theoretical work also is needed before a complete understanding of relationships between leaders and followers can be determined. Recent work on relationships between and differences in business leadership and management may be helpful as well (Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, & Koff, 2005; Eller & Carlson, 2009; Kotter, 1990).

Rural and Urban Districts

There has been some evidence that the skills superintendents need to function effectively may vary from region to region. Kennedy and Barker (1987) asked school board presidents in rural districts to indicate what leadership qualities they believed were necessary to function effectively in their districts. The superintendent's personal commitment, earned respect and belief system were highlighted as essential. Over a six-year period in the late 1980s, Kouzes and Posner (1990) surveyed more than 7,500 managers from a variety of public and private organizations nationwide. They concluded that the most important leadership ingredient was the leader's earned credibility. Of the four quali-

ties most frequently mentioned, the researchers identified three as credibility factors: honesty, competency and inspiration. These qualities could be identified in the leader's behavior. Leaders knew their constituents, stood up for personal beliefs, spoke with passion, led by example and were continuing to grow in knowledge and integrity. In the same context, MacCoby (1990) noted the difficulty of leading a constituency weaned on American individualism and personal autonomy. A superintendent facing these problems would be confronted by a variety of competing interests, personalities and situations. Akenhead (1984) argued that different situations called for different leadership styles, echoing much of the literature which called for frequent evaluation and adjustment of leadership styles. Akenhead offered four general types of leadership activity—promoting, analyzing, controlling and supporting as necessary to ensure effective leadership development.

A study of 24 rural superintendents and their boards (Chance, Ligon, Butler, & Cole, 1992), found that long-term rural school superintendents tended to maintain optimistic and realistic outlook concerning their schools, even in the midst of extreme challenges in the areas of budget and personnel shortages. They also were successful in managing a low level of internal conflict (between board members and between the board and the superintendent). These attributes and interpersonal skills not only enabled those superintendents to remain in their positions but gave them the odds on serving effectively.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (1995) noted that shared decision-making occurred in three main areas: budget, personnel and staffing, and curriculum/programs—with curriculum innovation frequently being the primary thrust. The report cited various locations—Chicago, Rochester, New York, Dade County, Florida, and Hammond, Indiana—in which corporate/school efforts had resulted in innovative uses of technology for both curricular innovation and greater administrative efficiency.

Technology in the Classroom

Highly effective school superintendents realize that today's students must be computer literate. For the majority of students, that will happen only when their classroom teachers are competent users of the many education applications of computer technology. Ideal superintendents provide not only the equipment and software but also the training and support required.

The possible applications of modern technology in the classroom are growing daily (Jukes, McCain, & Crockett, 2010; Ohler, 2010). Ranging from instruction to student use, computers have literally transformed instruction by making available vast amounts of useful information through the internet, by enabling students to engage in a variety of creative writing assignments, and by introducing them to simple database applications. Unfortunately, educators have often not made optimal use of this resource due to lack of funding; and expenses of this magnitude must be underwritten by school districts. Dwyer (1994), in an eight-year study of computer use in classrooms across America, concluded that technology had significantly increased learning. However, "There remains resistance to change among teachers" (p. 390). Dwyer asserted that 5.8 million teachers reported little or no use of computers (p. 390). The chief reason for lack of use cited in the study was cost—cost for maintenance, upgrading, staff development, and support of fledgling users.

Those findings were collaborated by Fabry and Higgs (1997), who reviewed Apple's research over a 10-year period. They found that there were major differences between expected and observed instructional/learning applications of technology in classrooms. Deficiencies in frequency of both student and teacher usage apparently stemmed largely from (a) teachers' unwillingness to change instructional methods, (b) teachers' fear of technology based on inadequate skills development, and (c) lack of financial resources to keep current equipment functional and to upgrade.

Clearly the expense of technology adds a burden to already deficient school budgets. One of the tasks of superintendents of the 21st century will be to meet the challenge of providing adequate funding and professional development opportunities so that every classroom teacher will be an effective user of up-to-date technology.

National Issues

Effective superintendents keep abreast of the many political issues that affect their districts, and they give proactive responses. The literature reflected three general categories of initiatives at the national level. Most of these have come through the joint efforts of former President Clinton, the Secretary of Education, and the U. S. Congress.

General Priorities for Schools

In *Call to Action* (Clinton, 1997), President Clinton and Secretary of Education Richard Riley announced national educational priorities in the areas of academics (especially reading and math), technology, teachers' performance, and school environment—physical safety (including facilities improvement where needed) and psychological safety. Specific initiatives were advocated—some to be funded through federal grants, others urged upon states and districts. The U.S. Department of Education has followed through on some of the priorities by recognizing schools for their excellence in educating Title I students (Thomas, 1998).

Specific Priorities for School Districts

In addition to highlighting general educational areas, former President Clinton and former Secretary Riley presented specific recommendations to states and local school districts:

1. The U. S. Department of Education published results of a study of conditions that might enhance the effectiveness of early reading

instruction (Thomas, 1998). Researchers concluded that students learned better when they were placed in smaller classes. Thus, former Secretary Riley noted that in Grades 1 through 3 class sizes should be limited to 15-20 students. Twenty-five states have begun to move towards smaller classes, at least in the primary grades (Thomas, 1998).

2. Riley addressed California citizens prior to their voting on Proposition 227 (Green, 1998) urging them to adopt English as the vehicle of education for all students.
3. Former President Clinton has endorsed the concept of charter schools and corporate partnerships with schools (Clinton, 1997).

Other Federal Educational Initiatives

Finally, on the national level, initiatives have targeted education efforts outside of the established school systems. For example, \$40 million dollars have been awarded in grants to establish 21st century community learning centers (Clinton, 1997).

Responses: Positive Directions in the '90s

Framingham, Massachusetts, School District: Response to Diversity

This district devoted web space to its high school of 7,500 students—29% of whom represented minorities (Framingham, n.d.b). The school boasts that its population speaks 45 different languages. The town maintains a relationship with a sister city, Lomonosov, Russia, and reported that in 1995, 28 students and faculty traveled to Lomonosov on a cultural exchange visit (Framington, n.d.a).

Prince William County, Virginia

The school district's web site provided impressive information on student achievement (PWPCS, n.d.). Class standardized test scores were posted

for each grade of each elementary school in the district. There were also links for comparison with national averages and for aids in understanding the data. Another link, "A+ What's Right! In Our Schools," provided brief updates on positive events in the system. This district appeared to be doing well and has been getting the word out that students are learning.

State of Oregon Superintendent of Schools

This state school system identified three goals for 1997: (a) to raise public awareness of technological advances, (b) to seek business and community support for educational resources, and (c) to create public and private advocacy groups for technology in the schools (Paulus, 1997).

Seattle Public Schools

Through their web site (Stanford, 1997) Seattle schools advertised the system's collaboration with Call to Action in key areas: reading, school safety, dropout prevention, site-based management, teacher accountability, and district/corporate agreements for enhanced educational opportunities. Also, the system has recently established exit criteria for Grades 5, 8 and 11.

Less Positive Responses to Current Issues

Des Moines, Iowa

The Des Moines Independent School District (Des Moines, n.d.) has established policy development and policy review committees. The development committee was chaired by the board president. Each committee stated that it received input from the superintendent and from the school board.

However, the superintendent was not a member of either committee. Since the superintendent must function largely on the basis of influence

(Leithwood, 1995; Robinson & Bickers, 1990), the latent possibilities for difficulties in that structure are obvious.

Massachusetts Schools

In response to the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MASS, 1994), which endorsed the establishment of charter schools in that state, educators published a position paper (MASS, 1994). The paper noted concern that charter schools would place public schools at a disadvantage because charter schools: (a) would reach a minority of the students, (b) could be selective, (c) would receive public school funds for the students they educated, (d) would draw many of the finest students and teachers away from public schools, and (e) would not be accountable for student outcomes.

Also, it was stated that charter schools, due to the very different circumstances of their operation, could not serve as models for public schools. The position paper recommended that charter schools be required to: (a) find a different source of funding, (b) accept all students who wished to attend, (c) place limitations on teachers' leaves of absence to teach outside their districts, and (d) follow guidelines for accountability.

Further, district educators requested that public schools be given assistance to establish innovative programs and be granted some of the same freedoms enjoyed by charter schools (MASS, 1994).

Revisiting Prince William County, Virginia

A check of central office personnel (PWCS, n.d.) revealed that 13 of the 27 employees were engaged in information services, community relations, and media. Clearly this school system places a high priority on keeping its stakeholders informed of school programs.

Qualities of Effective Superintendents for the 21st Century

The superintendent's job has retained the highly political nature noted by Berg and Barnett (1999), Leithwood (1995) and by Robinson and Bickers (1990). According to Cunningham, Harvey, and Koff (2005), flexibility and communication skills have become increasingly important for three reasons:

1. There has been increasing public pressure to improve the low test scores of American students in comparison to students of other nations.
2. The increasingly diverse student population has placed extraordinary demands on schools.
3. The cost of education has increased tremendously due to the demand for technological equipment in schools (Leithwood, 1995).

Many aspects of the superintendent's duties have changed. For example, in an earlier age the superintendent might have spent more time talking informally with the various constituencies and visiting the schools, whereas much of the superintendent's time is spent in the office—engaging in formal meetings and telephone conversations (Robinson & Bickers, 1990).

The superintendent must remain a generalist (Sharp & Walter, 1997), being involved to some extent in most aspects of school life as a symbolic leader. However, increasingly the successful superintendent must serve as a facilitator—enabling others to take direct ownership of the vision, goals and the outcomes of education.

One significant change emerged in the literature. Formerly the superintendent was expected to be responsible primarily for budgets, personnel, policy, and public relations. However, with the exposure of the inadequacies of American schools in a global society, superintendents and boards of

education have recently come under criticism. Increasingly they are being held accountable for student achievement.

This need for accountability for school systems has led some school districts to hire two top-echelon people to handle the task—one for financial administration and another to oversee curriculum and instruction. Among districts employing such a strategy are Baltimore and San Diego. Another school board that considered a similar path was Seattle. Faced with the untimely illness and death of Superintendent John Stanford, and wishing to retain its effective chief of operations (a public finance expert), Seattle considered the idea of a co-superintendency. The other member of the team would be a well-qualified educator. However, in the words of board President Barbara Schaad-Lamphere, “The idea of a co-superintendency has been thoroughly trashed” (Keller, 1999, p. 5). The reason cited was that it would be difficult to hold anyone accountable if two shared the responsibility. Seattle, too, moved on to consider a plan to hire another expert educator with a second spot under that of superintendent to handle finances.

Relationship to Principals

Although superintendents, as central office administrators, may not directly influence student achievement, they certainly have an impact through their relationships with school principals. In fact, superintendents, many of whom are former principals themselves, must function as teachers to their principals (VanderBogert, & Boris-Schacter, 1999).

District Culture and Educational Goals

Effective superintendents use their leadership skills to shape the vision of their schools, and that vision highlights students’ learning, collaboration, community building, and advocacy for at-risk students (Houston, 1998). In fact, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA)

recently told its superintendents (The Conference Daily, 2000) that they must be accountable for students’ educational outcomes. “Research by Hoyle and colleagues shows that in those places where student achievement is used to help measure a superintendent’s job performance, both performance and achievement appear to improve” (AASA, 2000, p. 2). Hertling (1999) presented two perspectives on that view. She reported that some believed this made superintendents more accountable for student outcomes, while others feared it pressured teachers to ‘teach to the test’. “While student test scores are the most commonly used indicator [for superintendents’ educational impact], they are also the most controversial” (p. 1). An underlying issue could be phrased, “How can superintendents exert helpful influence at the classroom level?”

In their article, “The Power of the Superintendent’s Leadership in Shaping School District Culture: Three Case Studies” (1998), McAdams and Zinck emphasized that effective superintendents accomplish these objectives through modeling, goal-setting and staff development. They also stated that, just as the principal is an instructional leader for the school, the superintendent is the district’s instructional leader. Regarding goal-setting, McAdams and Zinck advocated district-wide planning. “Building-level goals as well as principal and teachers goals are then aligned with the district goals” (p. 4).

Evaluation of Superintendents

According to Robinson and Bickers (1990), 90% of superintendents responding stated they were evaluated annually by their school boards. Two-thirds of that number reported that criteria were established jointly by the board and the superintendent. The broad categories targeted for evaluation were relationships and effectiveness of performance. These categories included relationships with the board, staff, other profes-

sionals, and the community; and policy and goals implementation.

In a 1989 study conducted by Educational Research Services (ERS) (Robinson & Bickers, 1990), only 32% of the responding superintendents stated they were evaluated on student achievement or personal educational knowledge. However, as indicated by web sites (Paulus, 1997; PWCPs, nd.; Stanford, 1997), superintendents and boards are becoming more accountable for improving educational outcomes. Reporting test scores, offering increased professional development for principals and teachers, and more collaborative efforts between schools and the community also signify central office accountability for educational outcomes.

Every school board is responsible for periodic evaluations of its superintendent's performance. The process of such evaluations has brought to light the qualities boards and school principals want from their superintendents. Before evaluations are conducted, according to Klauke (1988), superintendents and boards must clearly define goals and priorities within several management areas: administration, instruction, finance, operations, research and development, public and community relations, and human resources. More emphasis should be placed on the superintendent's educational leadership—an area often neglected in favor of business and finance. When a superintendent's role as educational leader was emphasized, that person was held more highly accountable to the board for ensuring that district values were translated into policy at the school level. More responsibility often meant increased leadership opportunity. Braddon (1986) argued that the superintendent's personal qualities often were not addressed in the formal evaluation processes. She argued that these qualities were essential in developing effective district-wide leadership. The prestigious North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) issued policy briefs in support of school decentralization (NCREL, 1995). The briefs explained that decentralization would

flatten the organizational structure and place more control in the hands of those who worked most directly with students. The report recommended a redefinition of central office roles to better meet the needs of students and the community. These recommendations followed the earlier observation of Goodlad (1976) that decisions should be made at the level of greatest knowledge and accountability. Goodlad noted specific occasions when his "rule" was not followed—times when people in authority acted on hearsay and made decisions for which others must be accountable.

International Recommendations

According to Anderson (1991), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made global administrative recommendations based on their needs assessment. Many of these seemed appropriate for U.S. school superintendents:

1. End-of-the-year student assessments should be conducted to increase learning.
2. Teachers should receive the resources they need for effective teaching.
3. Teachers should be selected according to their communication skills.
4. Schools must provide adequate resources for teacher development.
5. School administrators must create open channels of communication and listen to the needs and concerns of their teachers (Anderson).

CONCLUSION

Research has seen that the challenges to American education have become more complex with the advent of each decade of this century. Certainly the impact of so many social changes have called for increased knowledge, flexibility, communication skills, and professional concern

on the part of every educator. The effective school superintendent of today and tomorrow must be a principled, empathetic visionary who is able to lead by facilitating and to actively encourage the development of others. Unfortunately, there remains a paucity of empirical study on the traits and practices of effective administrators. While inferences may be made from the efforts of apparently successful superintendents, research is needed to scientifically validate excellence and to differentiate between superficially apparent success and long-term effectiveness.

In his State of the Union Address (Clinton, 1997), President Clinton unveiled a plan for targeting K-12 public schools in a manner that will require accountability of administrators and teachers. According to Sack (1999), this initiative, which would provide some funding to schools contingent upon their being able to demonstrate that they are successful and withholding it from those that appear to be failing, may be usurping some of the authority of the U.S. Department of Education. The latter has tended to provide funds especially to those schools that serve the economically disadvantaged without requiring accountability for results. This new approach would bring extra funding to schools to provide summer school and after-school programs, charter schools, to hire additional teachers, provide funds for building new schools and renovating old school buildings. It would also boost support for safe schools, drug-free schools, and violence prevention programs.

However, to receive much of this funding, schools would have to demonstrate success in the targeted areas by improving standardized test scores, diminishing violence and absenteeism and putting an end to social promotion of students who lack necessary academic skills to succeed at the next level. This initiative, if funded by Congress, will place a burden of accountability primarily on school superintendents and principals.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Conceptual Skills: These skills deal with the appropriate and balanced use of reason and intuition.

Factionated Board: A factionated board is made up of individuals who hold strong and conflicting perspectives on such major controversial issues as busing, taxes, and the nature of basic education.

Leadership Style: Leadership style evidenced by a specific leader is a combination of task-oriented behavior and people-oriented behavior.

Leadership Characteristics of the Ideal School Superintendent

Sanctioning Board: A sanctioning board thoroughly reflects the values of a homogeneous community.

School Board: Every school board is responsible for periodic evaluations of its superintendent's performance.

School Leadership: School leadership is the process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, pupils, and parents towards achieving common educational aims.

School Superintendent: The superintendent of a school system manages and provides leadership for the overall school district.