



This bulletin, produced by TASB Leadership Team Services, examines research and shares philosophies to inform and promote exceptional governance within school boards across Texas.

The Priority of Superintendent Tenure

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Introducing the Importance

School boards make a difference when it comes to student outcomes. Their beliefs and actions affect the culture, operations, and learning in the school district, and their relationship with the superintendent sets an example for every other relationship in the district, directly impacting student achievement.

Additionally, the board-superintendent relationship frequently determines how long a superintendent stays in the district. This is important because research demonstrates that with very few exceptions, the longer a superintendent stays in a district, the better students perform. A 2006 study by Tim Waters and Bob Marzano showed that even in the second year of a superintendent's tenure, student performance starts to improve.

Connecting with the Research

In "School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Performance," Tim and Bob reviewed findings of 27 studies involving 2,817 districts and achievement scores of

3.4 million students. They found a strong correlation between district leadership and student achievement, and five specific responsibilities of district leadership tied to student performance. These are:

1. Collaborative goal-setting
2. Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. Board alignment and support of district goals
4. Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction
5. Allocation of resources to support achievement and instruction goals

Staying the Course

Another important factor that drives improvement is maintaining a consistent course of action over time. Every time districts change their chief administrator, it disrupts the learning and evaluation of students and staff. The longer the superintendent stays, the more consistent the learning and evaluation become, leading to more success in schools. Districts that change superintendents too frequently have trouble attracting a qualified super-

intendent willing to commit to stay, especially if one of the factors contributing to the high turnover rate is a tumultuous board-superintendent relationship.

Improving the Board-Superintendent Relationship

Clarifying expectations, first among board members and then together with the superintendent, is the key to establishing effective board-superintendent relationships. Trustees and superintendents need to sit together at least once each year to discuss what they expect of each other. The board working collaboratively with the superintendent to develop a long-term vision and mission for the school district reinforces a consistent understanding of what needs to be done to make those ideals a reality. Writing down the goals and objectives for the school district and understanding the role of the board and superintendent in their achievement keeps the team focused and on track, improves the board-superintendent relationship, and exemplifies exceptional governance.