



District Administrator Performance Evaluation System (DAPES)

School Board: Are You Batman's Robin -or- Superman's Kryptonite?

What if you could raise student achievement in your school district by nearly 10 percentile points (basically, moving average achievement from the 50th percentile to the 60th percentile)? That's the impact of a highly effective Superintendent according to the research of Marzano and Waters in a meta-analysis of 27 research studies concerning superintendent effectiveness in 2, 714 school districts.¹ An essential component in making that type of leap forward is alignment between the School Board and the Superintendent. *The Key Work of School Boards*, published by the National School Boards Association, is based on the same conclusion that student achievement increases "when the Board and Superintendent work together in a systematic way."²

The Board's Impact

School Boards are charged with governance responsibility for their school districts, and, ultimately, increasing student achievement and decreasing achievement gaps. A Superintendent is hired as the district's chief executive officer, and he/she is expected to put the Board's vision into action. It therefore comes as no surprise that the Board's practices have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the Superintendent. The Board's leadership steers the district, and every employee's effectiveness is impacted by the Board's practices.

Help or Hindrance?

We know that organizations function more effectively when everyone is on the same page and working together to reach a mutually agreed upon destination. We call that a common vision, and we expect the Superintendent to use his/her "super" powers to get us there. But it takes more than just wanting it to happen. It takes support, collaboration, and assistance. That's the type of help that Robin gives to Batman so that they can both be successful. Conversely, a pattern of disagreement, dissention, and dysfunction will destroy any hope of anyone in the organization being successful, just as kryptonite made it impossible for Superman to succeed. School districts are complex organizations in which everyone succeeds together or everyone fails together. Student achievement hangs in the balance.

A Systemic Approach to Evaluation

Being an effective school district requires a systemic approach to employee job performance; this systemic approach is based on a partnership between the Superintendent and the School Board. At the heart of that partnership is a commitment to ongoing, embedded Board practice which honors fidelity to an evaluative process for the continuous improvement of the Superintendent, the Board, and the District. Just as an organization needs a strategic plan to move forward in the most effective manner, all employees need a systemic plan for performance expectations and performance evaluation that guides them along a path of continuous improvement related to Board goals for higher student achievement. Effective districts use a research-based, standards-driven performance evaluation system for every professional educator from the District Office to the classroom. This includes the Superintendent because effective leadership begins by leading.

It's the Law

Wisconsin statute 121.02(1)(Q) requires each School Board to evaluate in writing all certified school personnel in the first year and at least every three years thereafter. Rather than respond to this law as an inconvenient compliance issue to be taken care of bureaucratically, effective school districts use performance evaluations to clarify expectations so employees may continually improve their performance. Improved employee performance is an essential component for increasing student achievement and decreasing achievement gaps.

Benefits to the Superintendent

A research-based, standards-driven performance evaluation system clarifies the Superintendent's job duties, roles, and goals. It provides meaningful job performance feedback which serves as the basis for continuous improvement. Engaging in collaborative discussions about job performance helps to identify barriers to success, resources needed, and strategies for more effective leadership.

Benefits to the Board

A research-based, standards-driven performance evaluation system of the Superintendent clearly communicates the job performance expectations, standards, and evaluation criteria which provide greater accountability for job performance. The Board collects evidence and documentation for personnel actions such as training needs, performance improvement needs, recognition of goal accomplishment, compensation adjustments, job redesign, and employee discipline. Such a systemic approach serves as the gold standard for the Board's oversight function.

Benefits to the Community

A research-based, standards-driven performance evaluation system of the Superintendent communicates to everyone the District's vision, mission, and goals which are linked to the Superintendent's job performance, compensation, and continued employment. A district-wide systemic approach creates a platform for District success through employee development and proper utilization of employee talents and skills. It helps determine when a program or policy change needs to be made for the betterment of the school and community. In short, effective progress towards the Board's vision for the future can be made more efficiently when there is a systemic performance evaluation plan for all certified professional educators.

So What?

You get it—school districts do better when they use this type of systemic approach for Superintendent evaluation. So, what's next? In collaboration with Dr. James Stronge and a design team consisting of superintendents, school board members, and educators, CESA 6 has created a specially designed District Administrator Performance Evaluation System (DAPES). CESA 6 is now making this evaluation/professional development system available to school districts which are seeking to take this next step towards educator effectiveness for student achievement.

¹ Marzano, R., & Waters, T. (2009). *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

² Gemberling, Kathryn W., Smith, Carl W., & Villani, Joseph S. (2009). *The key work of school boards: A guidebook*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.