**Introduction**

The position of superintendent is complex, challenging, exciting and important. While there are duties and responsibilities associated with the position required of every superintendent, much of the work is contextual. Local school district conditions frame how you will use and manage your time. We offer here guidance designed to support your successful entry.

One priority for your early entry is to learn how some basic district “systems” work and how they reflect the district’s “culture”: school committee meetings and communication, collective bargaining and labor relations, educator evaluation, budget development and monitoring, and the current superintendent’s leadership practices. You can get started on this before you officially begin your new job, or once you’ve begun. If you join the NSIP program, you will be supported to prepare and present to your community a formal Entry Plan (in the summer) and a Report of Entry Findings (in the winter).

For those of you who have been appointed, but have not yet begun your work, please know that the district’s current superintendent can be an invaluable resource for you. Be thoughtful and respectful of the work still underway in the district under the superintendent’s leadership: any in-district transition work you do prior to your official starting date should be mutually agreed upon between you and the current superintendent.

**School Committee Meetings and Communications**

* Review video from previous school committee sessions to learn how members interact with one another and with the public, what the superintendent’s role has been, and how others participate, especially administrators.
* Review the content and format of the school committee packet to learn what the school committee has expected.
* Talk with the school committee chair to learn how the work of the committee has been organized:
  + How is the meeting agenda developed?
    - Does the superintendent prepare the agenda for review by the Chair of the Committee?
    - Do the Superintendent and Chair meet to jointly plan the agenda?
* What and how has the superintendent communicated with the school committee chair between school committee meetings? Regularly scheduled meetings? Phone? Email?
* How have the chair and superintendent handled emergencies?
  + Has the superintendent been sending a weekly report to the Committee? If so, what does it typical contain?
  + What kind of incidents and events does the superintendent keep the Committee informed about? By email? By phone? To the chair alone? The whole committee?
* Review the list of sub-committees and recent minutes so that you so that you know the role subcommittees play in the work of the school committee as a whole, as well as the role you and other central office administrators may be expected to play with each subcommittee.
* Take a quick look at the school committee policy manual.
  + How up-to-date is it?
  + What are the policies that have been up-dated most recently? Do they seem to reflect particular local conditions or concerns?

**Collective Bargaining and Labor Relations**

* Find out how often the superintendent meets with the leadership of the teacher union.
* Meet with the president of the teachers’ union to learn his/her perspective on labor relations, educator evaluation, teacher “morale”, and hopes and expectations for communicating with you.
* Meet with the central office person in charge of personnel and/or the school committee’s labor counsel to find out about the status of collective bargaining and labor relations.
  + What is the status of collective bargaining agreements?
  + Are all units working with contracts?
  + When will negotiations begin for each unit?
  + What do recent and any outstanding grievances reveal about the issues that have divided labor and management in recent years?
  + What are the strengths and shortcomings of collective bargaining agreements and any side memoranda of understanding?
  + What “adverse personnel actions” have been taken in recent years?
* Find out how collective bargaining has been conducted in the district?
  + Who sits on the “management team”?
  + What has been the superintendent’s role?
  + What has been the role of the school committee’s counsel? For how long?
  + What has been the typical approach bargaining, i.e., “positional” or “interest-based”?
  + What, if any, have been particularly contentious issues in bargaining?

**Educator Evaluation**

* Review a sampling of teacher evaluations to get a sense of the quality of implementation of the educator evaluation system in your new district.
  + Are teacher evaluations timely?
  + Are teacher goals clear and ambitious?
  + Are recommendations specific and actionable?
  + What is the distribution of performance ratings?
* Review the most recent evaluations of central office staff and principals to learn how thoroughly they address administrator performance.

**Budget Development and Monitoring**

* Review the district’s budget document to find out how informative it is.
* Meet with the business manager (or equivalent) to learn how the budget is developed and presented to the school committee and municipal officials.
  + Find out the role of municipal bodies and officials.
* Find out if there are any potential over-runs in the current year or next year’s budget.
* Find out if there is a capital improvement plan.

**The current superintendent’s Perspective and Leadership Practices**

It is very useful to learn what you can from the current superintendent. Learning his/her perspective on school committee, union, evaluation, and budget are important. In addition, learning about the current superintendent’s practices as the district’s leader will help you know what people in your new district are used to. One practical way to learn is to interview the superintendent. Another is to review “artifacts” like meeting agendas and principal evaluations. We suggest you do both.

Below are suggestions for questions you might ask the superintendent about aspects of his/her leadership practice:

Leadership Meetings

* How often and for what purpose(s) does the superintendent meet with central office administrators individually and as a team?
* Learn about the superintendent’s meetings with administrators.
  + Who are the members of the district leadership team(s)
  + How often do they meet? How long are the meetings?
  + What is a typical agenda and format?
* Does the district have a tradition of a summer planning retreat?
  + Who plans and leads it?
  + How long is it?
  + What is a typical agenda?
* Is there some kind of “superintendent’s advisory committee”?
  + How often does it meet?
  + What is its role?

School Opening

* Are there school opening routines and rituals? What is the superintendent’s role in them?

Visibility

* How frequently and for what purpose(s) has the superintendent conducted school visits?
* What school and community activities does the superintendent typically attend and/or participation?
* With what parent and community organizations, advisory committees and task forces does the superintendent regularly meet?

Standing Meetings

* What “standing meetings” are on the superintendent’s calendar each month?

**A final note:**

If you have time, you may want to get a sense of how the district “works” (its culture) by attending one or more of these events:

* + Scholarship Awards Night
  + Commencement
  + Organizational Meeting of the school committee (spring election)
  + National Honor Society Induction

You will need to make sure that your presence will not be a distraction or disruption to the important work the current superintendent is doing to end his/her time with the district, so be sure to consult with the superintendent before making any plans to attend any of these events in person. An alternative is to review video posted on the district’s website.