



Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
Proud Leadership for Pennsylvania Schools

Framework for Evaluation and Development of Objective Performance Standards for District Superintendents (Also applies to Assistant Superintendents)

Few supervisors enjoy the task of evaluating their employees. While challenging enough for just one person, multiply that challenge by a factor of nine. Add to this the complexity that group dynamics brings to the process along with the fact that among the nine are some who have not previously experienced evaluating employee performance on a formal basis. It is no wonder that in the past some boards may have delayed or neglected to conduct annual performance appraisals of their superintendent.

Good managers and boards know that managing performance does not start and end with the annual performance evaluation. The evaluation instrument itself, the end-point, is the wrong end of the process. It is like staring into the rearview mirror while attempting to drive forward. Managing performance is an ongoing, forward-looking, year-round process.

While many of us like to focus on which evaluation tool and process will get the job done with the least level of tension, focusing on these alone ignores the most critical activity. That is the discussion, development and agreement on the annual and long-term priorities, goals and performance standards against which the performance of superintendent will be measured.

The secret to a successful performance appraisal is not which evaluation tool, form or process is selected to evaluate the performance of the superintendent, rather it is in putting in the effort on the front-end of the process by developing consensus around what the superintendent is expected to achieve during the next evaluation period and beyond. Merely looking in the rearview mirror to determine the performance of district leadership without having established a clear sense of agreement about which road and direction they should drive, creates an environment where at some point the goals of the board and superintendent may not be in alignment. When boards and superintendents are aligned in their mutual understanding of district goals and priorities and these are articulated into mutually agreed to objective performance standards and the board and superintendent regularly review and discuss the progress in achieving these standards, the district is more likely to be successful.

Critical elements that help shape performance expectations include:

1. **Job Description** – In order to fairly and properly evaluate the superintendent/assistant superintendent, there must be agreement on the job duties, responsibilities and scope of authority. The first-step in developing appropriate objective performance standards is the development of an up-to-date, accurate job description.

2. Identify District Objectives and Initiatives. Review the district strategic plan, board-approved annual or long-term goals, school improvement plan(s) and other board-approved measurable goals, objectives and initiatives.
3. Develop Mutually Agreed to Objective Performance Standards – Mutually agreed to objective performance standards are specific, measurable statements of what should be accomplished within a specific time frame to improve the district. They should be aligned with existing goals and priorities for the school district approved by the board. Carefully crafted, well-written objective performance standards provide the basis for a portion of the superintendent’s annual performance evaluation. Mutually agreed to objective performance standards should be clear, focused, within the scope of the superintendent’s control and span of authority, aligned with broader district goals, designed to stretch but not exceed district capacity and resources, be realistic and achievable, measurable through observation or data, and set with clear timeframes, benchmarks and monitoring strategies.
4. Post Mutually Agreed to Objective Performance Standards on School District’s Publicly Accessible Website.
5. Board and Superintendent Establish Schedule to Periodically Review and Benchmark Superintendent’s Progress—The Board and superintendent should establish a regular schedule to discuss, in Executive Session, the ongoing progress towards meeting the objective performance objectives.
6. Board Conducts Annual Written Performance Evaluation – Board conducts annual written evaluation of superintendent and presents and discusses the evaluation in Executive Session with the superintendent.
7. Board posts the date the performance evaluation was completed and whether or not the superintendent met the mutually agreed to objective performance standards. The evaluation document itself is not required to be posted on the website.
8. Develop Mutually Agreed to Objective Performance Standards –Review job description, district strategic plan, goals and priorities, performance data and other information to develop new or update existing mutually agreed to objective performance standards. Update job description if necessary.
9. Continue ongoing review and dialogue on superintendent’s performance.

The evaluation of superintendent performance is an ongoing process for which the annual written evaluation is the capstone. A fair and useful evaluation process should strive to support and improve the performance of the superintendent and requires that members of the board have a good understanding of the superintendent’s job description, mutually agreed to objective performance standards and performance evaluation process and instrument. The proper use of the evaluation system supports open and honest communication between the board and superintendent. While effective use of these practices can lead to positive leadership and governance of the district, even a well-designed evaluation system will not cure an incompetent district leader or dysfunctional board. To be successful, there must be fundamental elements of trust and a culture that fosters behaviors among the team of ten that move the district to improve educational opportunities that advance student achievement.