

## *Success in the Superintendency: Tips and Advice*

### Quick Tips from superintendent contributors throughout the nation for new superintendents

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1. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway. Give the world the best you have and you will get kicked in the teeth. Give the world your best anyway. If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway. (Adapted: Kent M. Keith)
2. See the big picture.
3. Think systems.
4. Learn and understand the strengths of your staff; put them in the right positions, give them room to operate.
5. Spend time preparing for things that may never happen, and obtain the answers to questions that may never be asked.
6. Pay attention to what is important: people, budget, teaching and learning.
7. Communicate, communicate, communicate.
8. Take the job, but not yourself, very seriously.
9. We were selected/elected as superintendents, not supreme beings.
10. Humor, when well-timed, often saves the day (or negotiations).
11. Be private in constructive criticism and public with liberal praise for good work done by others.
12. Write down, if you must, the anger you feel towards another, but file it away unsent. Rather, meet face to face to try to resolve differences.
13. An often overlooked aspect of educational staff development is a program which enhances the skills of parents to assist and support their students. If parent involvement increases student success, then school leaders should spend more time and resources on developing this pivotal educational priority.
14. Form a book club (i.e. PLC) with the board members and/or the building and district level administrators. This advances skills and leadership roles of both groups.

15. Seek advice and counsel from a wide variety of sources before decisions are made; consider them all carefully, but in the end, trust your own judgment.
16. Leaders build relationships -- and thrive because of them.
17. Never ask anyone in your district to do something you are not willing to do yourself.
18. Do a self evaluation without board prompting.
19. Avoid socializing with school board members.
20. Have non-negotiable core values that all should meet. These are:  
Treat everyone the way you want to be treated; always do your best; when in doubt, always do the right thing.
21. Never, never modify the truth or misrepresent matters. Few get into trouble by telling the truth, many get fired for telling a little white lie for the greater good.
22. Keep balance between work and family. A person out of balance is not being as effective as one who is in balance with life priorities.
23. If you make a mistake, address it immediately; there is a very good chance the sun will rise the next morning.
24. Seek knowledge from your predecessor regarding insights, information, traditions, and culture of the district.
25. The foundation of any good educational system is high quality, caring teachers. High quality, caring teachers want to, and usually do, work for high quality, caring administrators. High quality, caring administrators want to, and usually do, work for high quality, caring superintendents.
26. Decisions should be made in consideration of: Internal politics; External politics; Fiscal impact; Educational merit.
27. Never underestimate the importance of, and the close connection between community pride and extra-curricular activities.
28. Remember, as a superintendent, everything you do is noticed by someone. All of your good deeds eventually come back to you in the form of positive community relationships. The superintendency is all about relationship building.
29. Listen to the whispers and chances are you will not hear the shouts. It is critical to listen to the constituents on a regular basis so awareness of little problems helps prevent

them from becoming big problems. Meeting with the community members helps build trust; people appreciate the opportunity to be heard.

30. The expectations of the parents plus the expectations of the teacher equals the success of the student.

31. Take care of the “big issues” and often, the “little issues” will take care of themselves.

32. Don’t play favorites with your administrative team. Administrative team loyalty is affected if you do.

33. Develop and maintain positive professional relationships.

34. School system leadership is a challenging responsibility and a great opportunity. Beyond the preparation, expertise, and knowledge needed for the job, the greatest attribute a superintendent can have is courage.

35. Get involved with your community and schools. Be active and visible.

36. Take time to reflect on your performance and your leadership. Learn from this reflection.

37. Never underestimate the potential impact of unintended consequences.

38. The job is you but it is not about you.

39. Be active in your professional association; get to know your colleagues.

40. Don’t lose your temper, always take the high road.

41. Stand up for what you value.

42. Superintendents who regularly visit classrooms see first-hand what is taught, how it is taught, and how the students behave—all valuable pieces of information.

43. Pick your battles carefully. Be willing to go the distance on issues you value the most.

44. Lead transparently.

45. Always leave the office with a briefcase or notebook.

46. Don’t ever say, “Don’t repeat this”. Whatever it is will somehow, someday be repeated.

47. Lead from the middle or behind, not in front.

48. Don't perseverate on battles not won. Move on.
49. Calm seas will not make an expert sailor.
50. Avoid becoming a lightning rod superintendent. Manage conflict well.
51. Superintendents put their job at risk because of communication (or lack thereof) not because they don't know the details of the curriculum.
52. Almost always avoid writing letters to the editor to defend or respond to someone else's letter to the editor.
53. Speak using facts. Opinions carry little weight in a verbal battle.
54. Be decisive not impulsive.
55. Never speak on a topic with a large (or small) group unless you know what you are talking about.
56. The person you treat poorly today may very well be your board member tomorrow.
57. Remember the kids.