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editors: gene v glass gustavo e. fischman melissa cast-brede

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Callan, Mary Frances & Levinson, William J. (2011) *Achieving Success for New and Aspiring Superintendents: A Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Pp. 309

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Reviewed by Carlos Nevarez & JoLynn Britt
California State University, Sacramento

With the current social, financial, and accountability demands and expectations on the PK-12 educational community, there is a growing need to produce and develop effective superintendents who can make a positive impact on their school districts. In doing so, the depth and breadth of job responsibilities and expectations (e.g., instructional manager, human resources management, policy and governance, leadership and district culture) are expansive with an increased focus on fiscal management. The superintendency is a high stakes position in that superintendents are key players in the success or failure of school districts. The job of a superintendent has become more challenging, considering in the past, schools were more manageable due to their focus on a routine-like structure, rather than the current focus on school reform. The mean age of superintendents is the highest in history

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at 54.5, with the national annual turnover rate of 15 percent. This means that in 5 years, on average, about 10,000 to 11,000 superintendent positions will most likely turnover. The graying of the profession presents an opportunity to create a new cadre of leadership in the superintendency.

This book is very timely in its efforts to both create and refine the capable and aspiring superintendent. The authors cover many important and practical issues regarding the superintendency, such as; instructional leadership, planning, goal setting, decision making, budgeting, collective bargaining, and various methods for effective communication through the lens of human resources. In a conscious effort to provide a very practical and hands-on approach to the task of being a superintendent, the authors have created numerous “real life” scenarios that a superintendent would encounter on any given day on the job. These scenarios are found in every chapter and are definitely a highlight of the book. Scenario analysis is an effective tool for developing analytical and problem solving skills required for careful examination of all relevant information necessary to move towards a solution. Although the content sections of the book include 10 chapters, for the purposes of this review, we have selected 3 chapters from the book that we feel are rich in their contribution to topic presented. We will give a brief overview of these selected chapters.

Chapter 3, *Getting Started: Organizing to Lead*, gives an overview of the various tasks and expectations that a new superintendent may encounter, and lays the framework for beginning a successful leadership role. Example agenda topics for the superintendent’s cabinet meetings (p. 74), leadership team meetings (p. 76), and instructional team meetings (p. 77) are presented, and a step-by-step approach to organizing and leading such meetings is discussed. In short, this chapter emphasizes the need to work productively with the staff, board, and consultants, while at the same time being sensitive to the culture and traditions within the district, in order to have the most positive influence on all outcomes.

Chapter 4, *Moving the District Forward*, presents the reader with the scenario that the foundation is set and the district is now organized. The next step is to create and

strengthen accountability systems, while building on the strengths of the district, and minimizing its weaknesses. This chapter outlines the interconnectedness among decision making, budget considerations, methods for improving teaching and learning, and goal setting and evaluation. A sample “Eighteen-Month Planning Chart” is presented (p.119) that identifies the tasks to be completed, as well as who should complete them and when it should be done. The focus of this chapter is to explain the necessary cycle of continuous improvement in which the plan should be to build each year on the successes of the one before it, so that, with the help of everyone involved, the superintendent can create a “culture of no-surprises” (p. 129).

In Chapter 9, *Communicating: Enhanced Decisions*, the authors present their case for the need for effective communication between the superintendent and the community at large. The chapter discusses the unique characteristic and needs of various groups including staff, parents, and the public. A general guide on what to include in a district website is presented (p. 247), along with strategies and suggestions for printing information and engaging the public in the goals and processes of the district. One of the “real life” examples in this chapter poses a scenario in which the district is in the midst of extensive budget cuts and the media has requested copies of the superintendent’s and board’s recent travel expenditures, along with internal e-mails between the board members and the superintendent on the budget issues (p. 258). Following this request, the superintendent’s salary appeared in the next edition of the local paper. This example, along with many others, provides a practical context for applying the strategies presented in the chapter. The authors indicate that effective communication by the superintendent and within the district is the most essential key to survival and success.

After a careful and critical review of this book, we feel it is necessary to make a couple of points regarding the intended goals of the authors and the overall effectiveness of the book’s content. In consideration of the growing expectation for superintendents to provide leadership in the context of making allowance for schools to reinvent themselves, the need to balance practical, applied

information and practices coupled with theoretical understanding is further warranted. Exploring various leadership theories and models (e.g., models of educational leadership and management, formal models, collegial models, political models) that are common to leadership practice would further enhance the richness of this book. The book is written primarily through the lens of a human resources approach and not so much through the lens of transformational leadership; the increase expectation for the superintendents to be agents of educational change demand skills and abilities to transform school districts.

The book does a successful job in providing knowledge about the structure, challenges and inner-workings of a school district, and for that reason, it is a very practical guide to new and aspiring superintendents who want to be successful. Furthermore, the content is presented in an organized and sequential manner, and the real life scenarios allow the reader to identify with the realities and daily challenges of this highly demanding job. The content presents the reader with not only a variety of problematic issues that a new superintendent would encounter, but also with several tools, strategies, and suggestions to be effective, insightful, and successful leaders and problem solvers. The practical approach to being a superintendent, along with the reoccurring theme that success does not happen overnight or even look the same in each district, is definitely one of the major strengths of this book. Anyone who is preparing for, or is in the early years of a superintendency, would benefit from reading this book.

About the Reviewers

Carlos Nevarez is Director and Associate Professor of the Doctorate in Educational Leadership at California State University, Sacramento. He received his PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Arizona State University. His research and teaching interest lie at the intersection of leadership, community colleges, Latinos in education, and organizational change. Dr. Nevarez has published numerous articles, reports, and policy briefs. Recently, he co-authored the textbook *Community College Leadership and Administration: Theory, Practice and Change*, and wrote a report for NBC's Telemundo

Network noting 22 steps Latino parents can undertake to guide their children toward education excellence.

JoLynn Britt is an Assistant Professor and Lead Supervisor for Language Arts in the Liberal Studies and Credentialing program at William Jessup University in Rocklin, CA. She teaches courses in teacher education and supervises student teachers in the field. She has also taught qualitative and quantitative research methods at the master's and doctorate levels, and currently teaches quantitative statistics in the Doctorate in Educational Leadership program at California State University in Sacramento. Her research interests include needs of adult learners and best practices for teaching and learning in the classroom.

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Editors

Gene V Glass

glass@edrev.info

Gustavo Fischman

fischman@edrev.info

Melissa Cast-Brede

cast-brede@edrev.info
