

BULLETIN BOARD

State of the Superintendency

From July 2013 to June 2015, nearly 30 percent of superintendent positions in the state turned over and the majority of those positions were filled by first-time superintendents. The magnitude of this turnover combined with transitions on local school boards due to election reform will likely have far reaching implications for public education in Michigan. This report provides preliminary observations regarding the 2014-2015 transitions and identifies related considerations of which school board members should be aware.

2014-2015 Governance by the Numbers

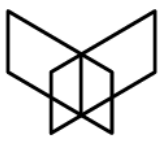
During the 2014-2015 school year, there were 84 superintendent vacancies: seven at intermediate school districts and 77 at local school districts. No less significant, in the election of November 2014, 1,000 school board seats were up for election out of 4,004 possible. Nearly 700 board members were elected at that time who had never previously served on a school board and, since the election, more than 100 additional board members have been appointed. In short, 20 percent of Michigan's school board seats have been filled by individuals with no previous experience at the school board table.

Intermediate School District Superintendent Transitions

Intermediate school districts appear to be feeling the impact of the Baby Boomer generation coming of retirement age. With seven vacancies this year and four last year, nearly 20 percent of Michigan ISDs are under new leadership. For the most part, ISD vacancies attract strong candidate pools comprised of experienced local superintendents as well as superintendents from smaller ISDs. Of the seven vacancies that occurred in the 2014-2015 school year, one was filled by a principal and the remaining six were filled by superintendents.

Local School District Superintendent Transitions

Local school districts are experiencing candidate pools that contain the *promise* of burgeoning talent, but often lack depth and variety in district-wide leadership experience. In general, candidate pools are being affected by the reduction of experienced superintendents due to retirement and the retirement incentive of five years ago; a lack of continuity on boards of education due to election reform; and a decline in the desirability of the position of superintendent.



Of the 77 vacancies in local school districts in the 2014-2015 school year, 42 percent were filled by principals and another 20 percent were filled by frontline administrators (central office). Given that 10 percent were unresolved at the time of this report, less than a third (28 percent) were filled by experienced superintendents.

- Principals being chosen for local superintendent positions are increasingly prevalent. In the 2013-2014 school year, 30 percent of the vacancies were filled by principals and in the 2014-2015 school year that number increased by 12 percent.
- Frontline or central office staff being chosen for local superintendent positions became less prevalent. In the 2013-2014 school year, a central office administrator was awarded the superintendency 33 percent of the time. That percentage decreased to 20 percent in the 2014-2015 school year. Likely reasons for this include a decrease in the overall number of central office positions and their relative desirability in the market (less responsibility, more stability). Simply stated, successful central office administrators can afford to be choosy when seeking a superintendency.

Why Do Superintendents Leave?

Superintendents change jobs for many reasons. In general, the natural career progression of a superintendent is from smaller, more rural districts to larger, more suburban districts. National studies place average superintendent tenure between three to five years, but it very much depends on contributing factors. Some of the most prevalent factors that contribute to superintendent departure include:

- Diminishing financial resources
- Increased expectations at local, state and federal levels
- Demands from special interest groups
- Pressures from the community
- Daunting time demands (80+ hours per week)
- Salary and benefits not commensurate with demands of position

It's vital to note that the **number one reason** superintendents seek a new position is the quality of the relationship between themselves and the school board, as well as among school board members. It is THE decisive element in superintendent tenure. Poor quality relationships between the superintendent and the board lead to a decrease in district stability and morale; increased conflict over instructional goals and objectives; a lack of collaboration around visioning and long-range planning; and negative perceptions of superintendent trustworthiness and credibility. When these conditions are present, the superintendent's ability to be effective is compromised and he/she may begin to look elsewhere.

Attracting and Retaining an Effective Superintendent

The conditions needed to attract a superintendent are consistent with those needed to keep a superintendent. Successful superintendents look for districts with good reputations in which the school boards:

- Work diligently toward being a high-functioning governance team
- Are specific and realistic about their expectations
- Honor chain of command and collaboratively established communication protocols
- Follow through on decisions that support the direction of the district

MASB's Leadership Development and Executive Search Services stand ready to help boards recruit.



MASB's Leadership Development and Executive Search Services stand ready to help boards recruit *and retain* effective superintendents through a whole host of custom services. For questions about this report or information about our services, please contact Donna Oser at 517.327.5923.