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# The Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards as Tools for Improved District Performance

*“The most beautiful stones have been tossed by the wind, washed by the waters, and polished to brilliance by life’s strongest storms.”*

—Anonymous

## **SUPERINTENDENT CONCERNS GENERATED BY A CHANGING SOCIETY**

The superintendent is the CEO of the school system in its entirety. It is the position that oversees all facets of the district, from personnel to academics to finance to community involvement. The role of today’s superintendent has changed considerably in recent years (Berman, 2005). The dynamics of society as they relate to schools have resulted in the superintendent, as the voice and face of “established education,” often coming under fire (Hoyle, 2004). Today’s superintendents must deal with internal

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and external political and governance issues that have arisen due to societal changes. These issues, among others, have generated a new breed of superintendents who must be both committed as well as ultra-resilient. On-the-job stress has also increased considerably, resulting in more turnover, increased mobility, and shorter tenures within the role (Bjork & Keedy, 2003; Fenwick, 2000; Glatter, 1996; Henry, 2000; Natt, 2000). This, in turn, has resulted in a shortage of superintendents on the national level that is bordering on critical (Bjork & Keedy, 2003; Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Hoyle, 2004; Natt, 2000). This shortage has, among other factors, created an increase in women and minority administrators (Krantz, 2000).

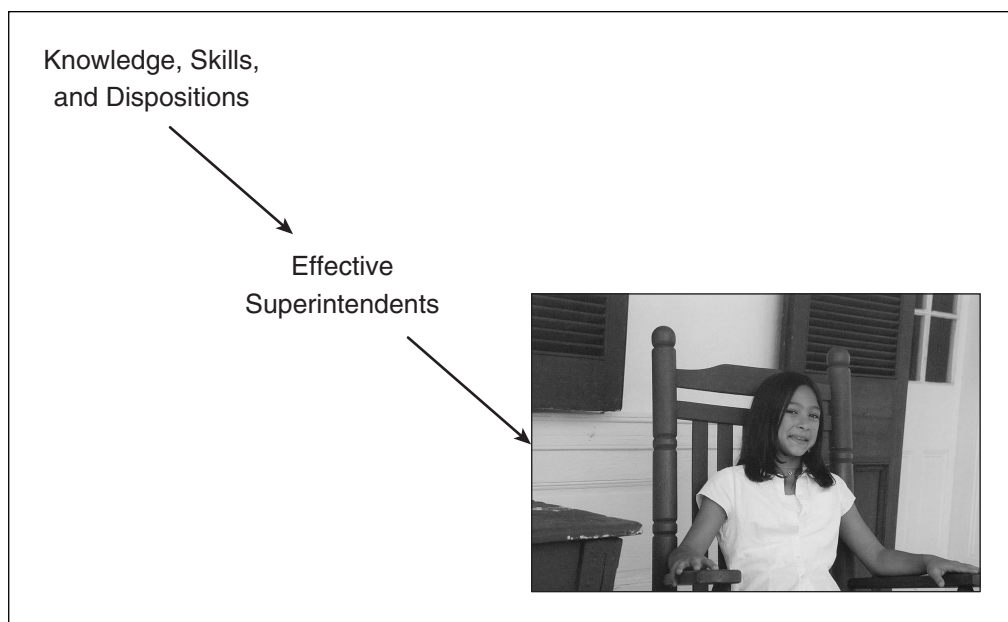
What, then, has become the role of the twenty-first-century superintendent, and what skills should the person in this position possess? What are the complexities of the changing roles within the superintendency, the quickly changing nature and responsibility of the top district leadership role, and changing contexts in which today's superintendents must work? What standards exist to help the superintendent become this "all things to all people" person? How were they developed, and what can they do to help superintendents not only survive but be successful in this increasingly changing and dynamic role? These are the questions we will answer in *Superintendent Leadership: Applying the Education Leadership Constituent Council Standards*.

### **WHAT SKILLS SHOULD A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SUPERINTENDENT POSSESS?**

Today's superintendents, above all, must become systems thinkers (Fullan, 2005; Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005). The superintendent must be able to understand the connection and alignment of all district dimensions while also understanding the relationship among the parts. In so doing, the superintendent must understand and build relationships among all the various district stakeholders. To be able to do this effectively, superintendents must understand and be able to guide the alignment of internal and external influences on the school system itself. Superintendents also need a deep understanding of change and the change process. The superintendent must have a certain set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, or attitudes and, next, understand the influences they have on change in a school district. The school district includes the campuses themselves and the individuals impacted by decisions and actions of a school board that have been recommended by the superintendent.

To begin to do this, we can organize these traits into three categories as used by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). As shown in Figure 1.1, these are as follows:

**Figure 1.1** Building Blocks for Superintendents



Source: Photo taken by Isabel Rendon-Peta

- **Knowledge:** What knowledge base should superintendents possess and utilize to be effective?
- **Skills:** What skills should superintendents have in dealing with people and organizations?
- **Dispositions or Attitudes:** What are the dispositions, or attitudes, that superintendents should display?

Indicators that superintendents are addressing the above knowledge, skills, and dispositions include, but certainly are not limited to, the following:

### **Knowledge**

- Understanding the differentiation among the roles of teachers, principals, other administrators, the board of trustees, and the superintendent
- Understanding and applying curriculum and instructional theories that are developmentally appropriate for an increasingly diversified student population
- Being a strong business and academic leader
- Being fiscally prudent with both district and personal funds
- Being a “systems” thinker and problem solver

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### Skills

- Being both a consensus and team builder
- Having experience in prior positions of educational responsibility
- Needing and soliciting active community support
  - Being the voice of education in ever-widening circles
  - Soliciting an increase in support and active participation at all levels of district communications
  - Displaying professionalism with people who are constantly negative and/or creating problems
- Being responsible, because being a superintendent is an honorable responsibility
- Having the skills to work effectively with people from diverse communities
- Managing people well
- Exhibiting self-control in words and actions
  - Being nonviolent and managing anger even when justifiably provoked
- Being a good communicator and, thus, having the ability to motivate and teach others concepts they need to facilitate the district achieving its vision
- Supporting and encouraging change for district improvement and enhanced productivity and accountability
- Being able to handle work-related stress and pressure in a healthy and balanced manner

### Dispositions

- Being committed to the value and truth of a well-rounded academic, cocurricular, and extracurricular education for all students
- Meriting the respect of others
  - Having a reputation such that those outside the immediate school community speak well of you
  - Having integrity and a character that is above reproach
  - Living wisely and with a clear conscience
  - Being faithful in all things, particularly to the cause of educating every student for an improved, free, and democratic society
- Displaying a healthy balance of confidence and humility in dealing with educational issues
- Having passion, wisdom, and the ability to facilitate the development, implementation, and evaluation of a district vision of learning

Superintendents who utilize such knowledge, skills, and dispositions will be rewarded with respect from others, increased student performance,

confidence in their abilities, and success for their districts. Are these all of the necessary traits to be a successful superintendent today? Of course not. The above is not an all-inclusive list. It is a starting point at which a superintendent's experiences are combined with passion and dedication to create student success. Taken singly, these traits can be abstract concepts. Taken collectively, they can be integrated into a workable model for superintendent leadership, as will be presented in the following chapters. This was the goal of the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) as it brought together varying professional groups and organizations to synthesize their different standards into a practical, workable set upon which all superintendents, in both public and private schools, could generate success.

Pressing questions for us are these:

- Exactly what are the ELCC standards?
- How were they developed?
- How can you and others utilize them to create and connect to realistic practice that will maximize student and district performance?

## **HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONSTITUENT COUNCIL STANDARDS**

For years, multiple sets of standards have existed for both superintendent and principal development. Although some of the standards were similar, there was no one concise set upon which the major professional administrator organizations and educational leadership professorial groups could agree. In 1994, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), already well known for its own 21 domains, created the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) to bring the various stakeholders together. The mission was to create one set of collaboratively developed and agreed-upon standards. Funding for the project was subsequently obtained from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Danforth Foundation. From 1994 to 1996, the ISLLC Consortium worked to create and seek input on this initial set of standards, which subsequently became known as the ISLLC Standards. In 1996, the National Policy Board adopted these standards, which were then published by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the group that consists of and represents the top educational agency representatives in each state.

In the meantime, the independent Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) was developed primarily by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the American Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the National Association of

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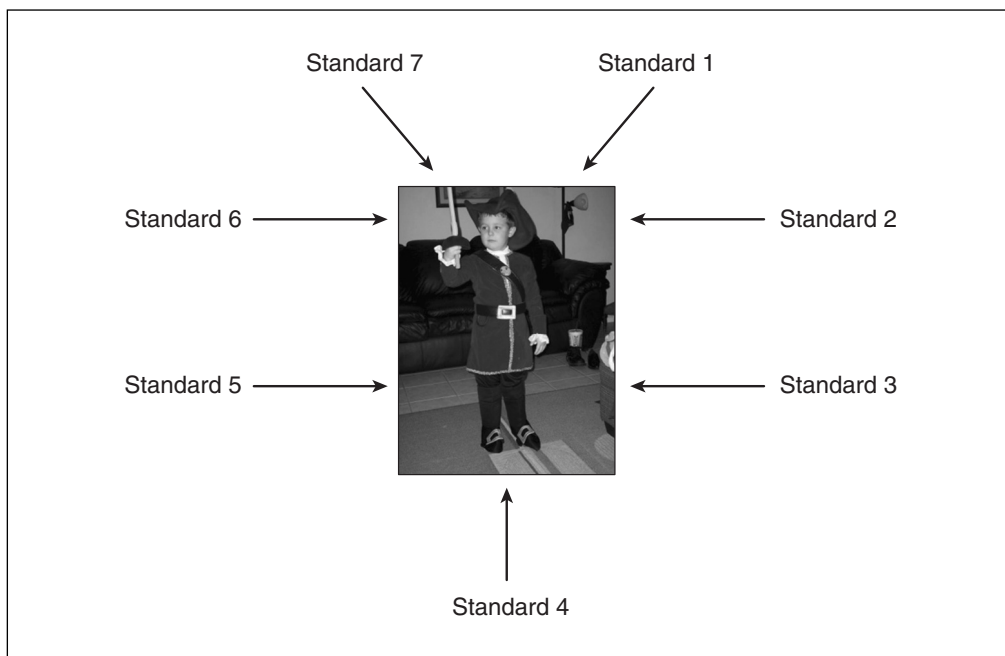
Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (Wilmore, 2002). This group utilized the ISLLC Standards to develop the Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership ([www.ncate.org](http://www.ncate.org)). The ELCC set added the seventh standard, which addresses the preparation of future superintendents and principals ([www.npbea.org/ELCC/ELCCStandards%20\\_5-02.pdf](http://www.npbea.org/ELCC/ELCCStandards%20_5-02.pdf)). The most striking, and some say most important, feature of the seventh standard is its focus on a year-long internship collaboratively developed among the university, the district field setting, and the student. While both the NPBEA and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) had their own, sometimes differing, opinions, the full set of ELCC standards was adopted by the NCATE in 2001. Since that time, school administrator preparation programs seeking to obtain NCATE accreditation have gone through an intense assessment process based on these ELCC standards.

In education, rarely does anything stay the same. During 2003–2005, CCSSO formed another subgroup, the Interstate Consortium on School Leadership (ICSL), which was charged with more adequately defining “highly qualified administrators” in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This charge came as a response from various state policy makers who were requesting assistance in clarifying this somewhat elusive issue (Sanders & Simpson, 2006). Exactly what constitutes a highly qualified administrator? One of the ways determined to do this was to research and update the ISLLC and ELCC standards, which by then were serving their purpose as national models for administrator preparation (ELCC) and performance-based assessment of practicing administrators (ISLLC). ICSL took on this in-depth task in conjunction with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. In 2006, the NPBEA Steering Committee developed and approved the model by which the updating of the ISLLC and ELCC standards would take place. Input was sought from various segments, including the original four administrator professional organizations plus the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), the National Council for Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA), and multiple practitioners in the field. This model continues in use as the standards refinement process progresses.

### **WHAT ARE THE ELCC STANDARDS?**

As shown in Figure 1.2, there are seven ELCC standards. The seventh standard is primarily intended for universities and alternative preparation programs to utilize as a guide in creating a collaborative and successful year-long internship for administrators preparing to become, in this case, superintendents. The focus of each standard is to maximize student learning.

**Figure 1.2** The Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards Focus on Student Success



Source: Photo taken by Emily Rollen

The full set of standards is as follows:

**Standard 1.** A school district leader who has the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning that is supported by the school community

**Standard 2.** A school district leader who has the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school culture, providing an effective instructional program, applying best practices to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff

**Standard 3.** A school district leader who has the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by managing the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment

**Standard 4.** A school district leader who has the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources

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**Standard 5.** A school district leader who has the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by acting with integrity and fairness and in an ethical manner

**Standard 6.** A school district leader who has the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context

**Standard 7.** The internship provides significant opportunities for candidates to synthesize and apply the knowledge and practice and develop the skills identified in Standards 1–6 through substantial, sustained, standards-based work in real settings, planned and guided cooperatively by the institution and school district personnel for graduate credit.

### **CREATING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE ELCC STANDARDS AND REALISTIC PRACTICE**

By utilizing the ELCC-ISLLC standards as a model upon which to focus decision making and subsequent action, superintendents can rely upon the research that has been developed by the multiple “constituents” involved in development of the standards. This book seeks to connect the collaboratively developed concepts within the standards to practical application in real schools and districts today. The standards provide a research base that superintendents and other district-level leaders can use to improve relationships within the district and with the school board and to create a learning community, resulting in improved student performance and organizational leadership. No longer will “All students can learn” be something people say but may not totally believe. All students can learn if provided the right motivation, support, and developmentally appropriate curriculum and instructional strategies that meet their needs and are relevant to their lives. Obviously, this is easier said than done. It is the quest we all share. Will this ever be easy? Probably not. Few things worth achieving are ever easy. Yet our goal is that with hard work, commitment to the cause, creativity, persistence, and lots of resiliency, superintendents can lead districts to improve learning for all students. In the end, isn’t that what education is all about?

### **THE ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT IN A CHANGING DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY**

Without a doubt, the world today is changing (Berman, 2005). Sometimes, it seems this is happening faster than we can keep up with.



Thus, it is easy to become bogged down, even overwhelmed, with the pressure pushing in on us in an increasingly demanding manner. Data shows that superintendents leave their current positions earlier than they might have desired and that some leave the profession altogether (Czaja & Harman, 1997). Combined, these trends create a nation where there are not enough solid superintendents to go around (Bjork & Keedy, 2003; Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Bowler, 2000; Glatter, 1996; Natt, 2000; Tingly, 1996). The ELCC standards are not intended to be rules that will magically solve all problems. They are intended to be guidelines upon which superintendents and other district leaders can “hang their hats”—to hold onto tightly as a guidance model in this ever-changing world.

Is it easy to be the CEO of a school district? Definitely not. But are the results worth it if the job is done correctly? Absolutely! That is what the ELCC standards are for. They are guideposts, or benchmarks, to help us along our way as we seek to improve our ever-changing society by utilizing a strong research base.

Will this be easy? No.

Is it achievable? Yes, without a doubt. Read on, and let’s see how to do it.