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CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND
SELECTION OF SUPERINTENDENTS FOR CLASS III SCHOOL DISTRICTS
IN NEBRASKA

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln

ED.D.

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CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND
SELECTION OF SUPERINTENDENTS FOR CLASS III
SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEBRASKA

by

David L. Curry

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Interdepartmental Area of
Administration, Curriculum, and Instruction

Under the Supervision of Professor Alan T. Seagren

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 1980

TITLE

CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND
SELECTION OF SUPERINTENDENTS FOR CLASS III
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PREVIEW

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

As early as 1946 the American Association of School Administrators stated:

Probably the most important responsibility resting upon a modern board of education is that of keeping a competent superintendent in charge of the community schools. . . .

But from time to time a vacancy occurs and then there is the job of searching for, and employment of, a new executive. The principles that should govern a board of education's actions either in obtaining or retaining a competent school superintendent are not too well defined as yet, but even the principles that are established are too often ignored by boards confronted with this vital problem.¹

Few would disagree with the desirability of a high degree of selectivity in the appointment of public school superintendents. The major questions seem to be: what criteria shall be considered and what procedures followed in the search for the most promising among the large number of persons who become candidates for superintendent positions each year? Ascertaining what characteristics are most likely to satisfy the leadership, human relations, technical and conceptual requirements of the superintendency is one of the most important and perhaps most difficult problems facing boards of education.

The Educational Policies Commission stated in 1965 that:

The superintendency of schools is one of the most crucial and perhaps the most difficult public positions in American life today. The occupant of this position, more than any

¹American Association of School Administrators, School Boards in Action, Twenty-fourth Yearbook (Washington, D.C.: N.E.A., 1946), p. 63.

other single person in the community, influences the shape of public education. Thus, he has a basic role in determining what will become of the young people in his community and through them what his nation and community will become.²

Given the importance of the role of superintendent and the difficulties inherent in selecting a person for the position, careful consideration needs to be given to selection criteria. Selection criteria can be viewed as being of two major types. The first concentrates on the more readily identified and measured characteristics such as age, preparation, experience and qualification for certification as an administrator. The second probes other and often more difficult to assess characteristics of candidates such as leadership and human relations skills. Those items which define the situation must be considered in conjunction with criteria describing the persons to be considered for selection.

The job of the superintendent has become increasingly complex as social problems and resulting pressures have increasingly put demands upon the school. This increased complexity demands that educational leaders be effectively trained and selected to work toward the solutions of schools' problems. As early as 1947 a group of professors of educational administration described the job of the school administrator as follows:

One of the outstanding characteristics of the American scene is rapid social change, and the sum of all changes to a large degree, results in a need for a continuous modification of educational activities. The unique position of the school administrator carries with it a responsibility for an adequate analysis of change and a correct interpretation of

²Educational Policies Commission, The Unique Role of the Superintendent (Washington, D.C.: N.E.A., 1965), p. 1.

the impact of change upon the relationship among the various agencies concerned with the general welfare . . . educational progress results, for the most part, from changes in the educational program. The school can make many of these changes only as the community becomes aware of the needs that may be met by the school . . . the administrator, in rendering this service, is responsible for: (1) bringing before the people the information necessary for an understanding of the needs and the significance of the resultant problems; (2) explaining ways in which the school can meet these needs for the limitations of the school in this respect; and, (3) adapting the present program or developing new activities pointing toward the solution of the problem.³

Professional leaders in education have many responsibilities which call for a wide range of skills including human relations, conceptual, and technical skills. Human relationship skills are needed to organize and coordinate the efforts of individuals and groups. Conceptual skills are needed to provide in-service programs and develop scientific attitudes toward implementing research findings and evaluating the results of their use. Finally, the number and complexity of the technical tasks of the school administrator is enormous. Financial accounting, purchasing, building construction and maintenance, interpretation of laws, regulations, and requirements of local, state, and federal agencies are only part of the legal and technical competencies which must be possessed by the effective school executive.

In 1962 the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association jointly produced a pamphlet, "On Selecting a Superintendent of Schools." The pamphlet made a number of recommendations regarding procedures to be followed in the recruitment

³John E. Marshall, ed., "Developing Leaders in Education" (report of a work-conference of Professors of Educational Administration, Endicott, New York, 1947), pp. 22-23.

and selection of a superintendent. The two associations jointly stated:

Even with clearly defined expectations, adequate knowledge, and an understanding of the job to be performed, difficulties often set in when a board realizes that it must secure the services of a new superintendent. This need not and should not happen.

The selection of a chief school administrator should be a well thought out, systematic procedure. The board should not try to fill the vacancy over night or in one short meeting. It is much better to devote two or three months to searching for a highly qualified school administrator than to make a hasty and unwise decision. Nevertheless, the board should move ahead. Delay or inactivity for many months is an almost sure way to discourage and lose potential candidates.

At this point the board's next step is to agree upon a procedure. An adequate selection procedure usually involves at least ten steps:

1. Know what you want.
2. Determine evaluative procedures.
3. Announce the vacancy.
4. Examine local candidates.
5. Develop a list.
6. Narrow the field.
7. Interview the best.
8. Visit the candidate's community.
9. Make a choice.
10. Work with the press, television, and radio.⁴

School boards should consider very seriously the qualifications and capabilities of the person chosen to fill this most important public position. The criteria and procedures for selecting superintendents are of great importance. The major questions seem to be, "What resources are available to school boards to assist them in this most important task?" and "Are there resource criteria and procedures which can be used by boards of education in the recruitment and selection of superintendents?"

⁴ American Association of School Administrators and National School Boards Association, On Selecting a Superintendent of Schools (Washington, D.C.: A.A.S.A. and N.S.B.A., 1962), p. 5.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose in the study was threefold: (1) to determine the actual criteria and procedures utilized in the recruitment and selection of superintendents for Class III school districts in Nebraska as reported by board members; (2) to determine the perceptions of ideal criteria and procedures as perceived by board members and superintendents; and (3) to recommend, on the basis of actual practice and perceptions of the ideal, a set of resource criteria and procedures for use in the recruitment and selection of superintendents for Class III school districts in Nebraska.

Research Questions

Research questions addressed in the study were:

1. What criteria and procedures should be established for use in the recruitment and selection of superintendents for Class III school districts in Nebraska?
2. How do board members' perceptions of ideal criteria and procedures compare to the actual criteria and procedures used in the recruitment and selection of superintendents for Class III school districts in Nebraska?
3. How do superintendents' perceptions of ideal criteria and procedures compare to the actual criteria and procedures used in the recruitment and selection of superintendents for Class III school districts in Nebraska?
4. How do board members' perceptions of ideal criteria and procedures compare to superintendents' perceptions of ideal criteria

and procedures used in the recruitment and selection of superintendents for Class III school districts in Nebraska?

In order to answer the research questions a survey was conducted to determine:

1. The current practice of boards of education in terms of criteria and procedures used in the recruitment and selection of superintendents.

2. The relative importance of the various criteria and procedures as perceived by board of education members involved in the selection process.

3. The relative importance of the various criteria and procedures as perceived by the superintendents who were selected.

Definition of Terms

The following were used consistently as defined below:

Class III school district. A Nebraska school district embracing territory which has a population of more than one thousand and fewer than fifty thousand inhabitants that maintains both elementary and high school grades under the direction of a single board of education.⁵

Criteria. Standards, norms, or judgments selected as bases for quantitative and qualitative comparison.⁶

⁵Nebraska, Education Code Sec. 79-102.

⁶Carter V. Good, Dictionary of Education (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 146.

Board of education. The term school board or board of education shall mean the governing body of any school district.⁷

Perception. Awareness of external objectives, conditions, relationships, etc., as a result of sensory stimulation; a continuous process of integration of present and past sensory impressions.⁸

Procedure. A series of related steps, which constitute an accepted manner of performing.⁹

Superintendent. The chief executive officer of a school district; the administrator who reports to a board of education.¹⁰

Assumptions

1. School board members could accurately recall steps followed in the superintendent recruitment and selection process.

2. School board members could rank the criteria and procedures used in the recruitment and selection process according to the relative importance which they placed on each of the various criteria and procedures.

3. Superintendents could rank the criteria and procedures used in the recruitment and selection process according to the relative importance which they placed on each of the various criteria and procedures.

⁷ Nebraska Revised Statutes, Section 79-101(12), (Reissue 1976).

⁸ Good, op. cit., p. 389. ⁹ Ibid., p. 374.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 539.

Limitations

The study was limited to the perceptions of school board members who had participated in the process of selecting a superintendent for a Class III school district in Nebraska during the prior three-year period from July 1, 1975 to June 30, 1978, and to the perceptions of the superintendents who were selected. Therefore, generalizations made from the study are limited to Class III school districts in Nebraska.

The study was limited by the apparent lack of agreed upon criteria and procedures for selecting school superintendents in a rural setting. A preliminary review of literature revealed "general" criteria and procedures, but the literature did not identify criteria and procedures dealing specifically with the superintendent in the rural setting.

The study was subject to the usual limitations associated with the use of questionnaires as a research instrument. The same question frequently has different meanings for different people.

Significance of the Study

The perceptions of school board members and superintendents regarding the relative importance of criteria and procedures used in the recruitment and selection of superintendents were measured. The actual practice of boards of education in terms of criteria and procedures used in the recruitment and selection of superintendents was also measured. Comparisons were made between the perceived importance by board members and superintendents of various criteria and procedures

and the actual practice of school boards in applying the criteria and procedures in the recruitment and selection of superintendents.

The study adds to the empirical evidence on the recruitment and selection of superintendents in the rural setting. A review of selected literature indicated that research concerning generally accepted criteria and procedures for the recruitment and selection of superintendents in rural settings was extremely limited. The resource criteria and procedures developed can serve as a guideline for school boards to use in selecting superintendents and provide information for persons seeking a school superintendent position.

PREVIEW

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Historical Development of the Superintendency

The office of the superintendent of schools in American public education is a relatively recent office. Early American schools were dominated, controlled and administered by board members. People met regularly in town meetings and decided all questions in regard to the schools. At these meetings all questions of school policy and operation were decided.¹ The superintendency grew out of the need for a full time person to supervise and administer the schools. The rapid growth of the country demanded that more time and effort be devoted to administering the ever growing schools.

The position of superintendent developed primarily from common efforts operating on two separate fronts. On one front there was the movement to create the superintendency at the state level, working downward through intermediate levels to the local school head. On the home front, local boards of education were working independently to figure out how the schools could be looked after if the town committeemen would step out of the picture. Neither group had provident approaches to the problem, but they felt their way along gingerly.²

The first superintendent of schools was appointed in 1812 at the state level in New York. The practice spread rapidly to other states

¹Ward G. Reeder, School Administration in a Democracy (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 9.

²Robert E. Wilson, The Modern School Superintendent (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 3.

and was accepted by new states almost as quickly as they came into the union.³

On a state level the office of superintendent of schools has remained primarily a reporting center. The strong American conviction that the control of education should remain in local hands will undoubtedly prevent any sizeable authority ever being granted to a state office.⁴ This does not deny the need for a state school administrative office. There seems, however, to be a general attitude that the state office can best serve education by providing information, stimulating improvements, and equalizing opportunities through a distribution of state monies.⁵

The development of hundreds of small local school systems accompanied the rapid westward movement of the United States. The task of visiting these numerous schools soon became impossible for a single state officer or committee. Regional supervisors were soon necessary to staff the intermediate office between the state and the local school districts. Since the county system of government was already established, a natural conclusion was that the county would become the organization for appointing intermediate administrative officers. This intermediate superintendency took various forms and names in different states. Soon, however, it became known as the office of the county superintendent.⁶

³Wilson, op. cit., p. 4.

⁴Ibid., p. 4.

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁶Ibid., p. 6.

While states and counties were establishing their respective superintendencies, there was a simultaneous action by local communities. Possibly because of the pioneer spirit that caused people to take pride in doing things themselves, local efforts leading to the establishment of the superintendency were more lasting than the regional efforts. Buffalo, New York, in 1837, established the first city superintendency. Louisville, St. Louis, Providence, and Philadelphia followed suit establishing the position by 1840 and the movement became widespread.⁷

The duties of the first superintendents were mainly clerical, related to the inspection of schools, business matters and enrollment; and instruction, related to supervision of teachers and the instructional program.⁸ In some instances, the superintendent was more clerk than executive or administrator.

Then, as now, board members were most willing for the superintendent to handle those things with which the board felt least secure. In most communities this seemed to be the instructional aspect. This thinking is probably the origin of the practice of appointing the best teacher as superintendent, a custom still observed in a few small communities.⁹

The role of the superintendent has changed since the inception of the office. Griffiths indicated that there were four historical categories in the role of the superintendent. At its inception and until about 1910, the superintendent was considered a scholarly

⁷ American Association of School Administrators, The American School Superintendency, Thirtieth Yearbook (Washington, D.C.: N.E.A., 1952), p. 55.

⁸ Russell T. Gregg, "Beginnings of Administration of Public Education," Encyclopedia of Educational Research, ed. W. S. Monroe (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 20.

⁹ Wilson, op. cit., p. 8.

educational leader. From 1910 to about 1929, the superintendent was considered a business manager rather than an administrator. During the period from 1929 to about 1954, the superintendent took the role of an educational statesman in a democratic society, in keeping with the philosophy of John Dewey and William James. In this role an important factor was for the superintendent to be an expert in human relations. From 1954 to 1965 the superintendent was considered to be an educational realist.¹⁰

The American Association of School Administrators viewed the superintendency as having evolved through five eras:

The early superintendent was a schoolmaster, a man who kept school. The next era saw the emergence of a statesman, or prophet, whose appeals to the conscience of Americans and whose vision of the possibilities of free public education were in the tradition of Horace Mann and Henry Barnard. The third era produced the manager-superintendent. Fascination with mass production and with the organizational structure of the large corporate enterprises led school superintendents to apply the same techniques to the educational enterprise. . . . The fourth era was the era of the technician--the era of scientific professional school superintendent. World affairs moving at a bewildering pace and pressing in on every community and every school district, called for new dimensions of leadership, educational statesmanship, and genuine professionalism.¹¹

The role of the superintendent at the present time is not at all clear and seems to be changing every few years. Is the superintendent to be an educational philosopher, an educational change agent, or an educational theorist? Michel concluded:

¹⁰ Daniel E. Griffiths, "Taxonomies of Educational Administration," Educational Administration, International Perspectives, eds. George Barrow, Dan H. Cooper, and William J. Walker (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967), p. 165.

¹¹ American Association of School Administrators, The Education of a School Superintendent (Washington, D.C.: 1963), p. 3.