

## INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

Los Angeles Unified School District  
Independent Analysis Unit

### INFORMATIVE

**TO:** Members, Board of Education

**DATE:** November 4, 2021

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**SUBJECT:** Advice on Superintendent Search

Choosing the next superintendent is a critical responsibility that the School Board is now undertaking. The Board has reached out to constituents, convened meetings with key stakeholders, and surveyed thousands of parents, employees, community members, and students about what they want in their next superintendent.

But the Board should also see *itself* as a stakeholder group and consider its own unique perspective—that of governance.

“Governance is the process where the direction of the organization is set, the structure is established, and accountability both fiscal and programmatic is assured.”<sup>1</sup> School boards govern school districts, but not alone. They hire superintendents and then govern together with them, which is why the IAU advises the Board to look for a candidate with a *co-governance mindset*. The next superintendent should view the Board as not just powerful and legitimate, but as part of her team.

A superintendent candidate with a co-governance mindset will:

- Commit significant time to Board affairs and work to build and maintain a strong relationship with the Board.
- Have strategies to engage the Board and involve them in the strategic goals of the district (look for a candidate to talk about “district goals,” rather than “Board goals” or “superintendent goals”)
- Display a firm commitment to Board capacity building. One job of the superintendent is to educate the Board. The superintendent should view tough questions as opportunities to facilitate understanding, not as micromanagement.
- Habitually present the complete story to the Board, not just the good news, and involve the Board even when a vote is not required, with the goal of having the Board hear about initiatives or issues from the superintendent’s office first.
- Build Board support for strategic initiatives as part of the strategy of effective leadership. The effort to build support requires creativity and energy and could include in-depth informational sessions for Board members, meetings with individual Board members to

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell, D., & Fullan, M. (2019). *The governance core: School boards, superintendents, and schools working together*. Corwin Press.

hear and address their concerns, or other ways to facilitate understanding and collaboration.

Of course, to build and maintain a strong relationship with the Board, to educate board members about district organization, programs, curriculum, fiscal matters, and other issues and to plan, implement, and build support for strategic initiatives, the next superintendent must be an experienced public educator and strong leader. But L.A. Unified would also benefit from a superintendent who serves for several years to lead organizational change and see it through. A strong two-way relationship between the superintendent and the Board could help the next superintendent develop a long-term bond with L.A. Unified.