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LEADERS ASSOCIATION

Effectiveness Standards

For Kentucky School Superintendents



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Kentucky Association of School Administrators
87 C. Michael Davenport Blvd.
Frankfort, KY 40601



(502) 875-3411



www.kasa.org

Executive Summary

Kentucky's public schools are operating in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing environment. Superintendents are expected to serve not only as instructional leaders, but also as chief executive officers who inspire a shared vision, steward public resources, cultivate leadership capacity, strengthen community partnerships, and ensure every student is prepared for an ever-changing future. These evolving responsibilities require a leadership framework that is clear, relevant, and focused on the work that matters most.

The 2026 *Superintendent Effectiveness Standards* represent the next evolution of Kentucky's leadership expectations. Building upon the original standards developed through the Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA) and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), the framework has been modernized to reflect today's educational landscape while preserving the core principles of effective district leadership.

The revised standards streamline the original seven standards into five integrated leadership domains:

1. Strategic Leadership
2. Instructional Leadership
3. Cultural Leadership
4. Human Resource Leadership
5. Operational Leadership

Together, these domains define the essential knowledge, skills, and practices required to lead a high-performing, future-ready school system. They emphasize strategic thinking, innovation, instructional excellence, organizational culture, talent development, operational effectiveness, equity, and continuous improvement.

The framework also recognizes that exceptional district leadership is built upon a strong, collaborative partnership between the superintendent and the Board of Education. Together, they establish a shared vision, govern with clarity and purpose, steward public resources responsibly, and create the conditions necessary for sustained student success.

More than an evaluation instrument, the *Superintendent Effectiveness Standards* serve as Kentucky's roadmap for professional growth—from onboarding through retirement. They provide a common language for leadership development, coaching, mentoring, self-reflection, and continuous improvement while helping districts establish clear expectations for executive leadership.

Ultimately, these standards are designed to strengthen leadership across Kentucky's public schools by ensuring every superintendent is equipped to navigate change, build trust, develop future leaders, and create learning systems where every student, every educator, and every community has the opportunity to thrive.

Historical Overview

For 2026, these standards have been further modernized to reflect the evolving responsibilities of superintendents as executive leaders. The updates streamline the framework by consolidating the standards into five critical areas of leadership while retaining the comprehensive scope of the original seven standards. These updates address contemporary priorities such as virtual learning, community engagement, and equity, reinforcing the superintendent's essential role in modeling and upholding the highest leadership standards within their district. The standards also emphasize that success depends on the superintendent's ability to collaborate effectively with the Board of Education. A strong partnership between the superintendent and board is critical for creating and sustaining a unified vision for student success.

Intent of the Standards

The *Superintendent Effectiveness Standards* are designed to:

1. Streamline and simplify the framework, focusing on the superintendent's most impactful leadership responsibilities while reflecting the evolving needs of districts.
2. Serve as a guiding framework for understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of the superintendent's work, helping them focus on the most significant areas of leadership.
3. Provide a roadmap for ongoing professional growth and effectiveness from career entry (new superintendent training) through career exit.
4. Establish clear expectations for modeling best practices and maintaining accountability, ensuring superintendents hold themselves to the highest ethical, professional, and leadership standards.
5. Support individualized professional development for new superintendents and assist in evaluating the successful completion of the state's induction program.
6. Reinforce that while no single superintendent may excel in every standard, their leadership team should collectively demonstrate the full breadth of knowledge, skills, and competencies required to meet district goals.

The Standards underscore the superintendent's role as the ultimate model of best practices, setting the tone for their district and fostering a culture of excellence and accountability.

Organization of the Standards

The Kentucky Superintendent Effectiveness Standards are organized into four key areas that outline the superintendent's leadership responsibilities:

1. **Standard:** A broad heading that captures the superintendent's critical knowledge, skills, and abilities.
2. **Summary:** A concise statement explaining the purpose and rationale of the standard.
3. **Practices:** Observable actions and behaviors that demonstrate proficiency in meeting the standard.
4. **Artifacts:** Examples of best practice evidence that illustrate effective leadership practices for each standard; not required or exhaustive.

1. Strategic Leadership

Summary: The superintendent works collaboratively with the Board of Education to create the conditions necessary for articulating the district’s vision, mission, and goals. Through clear communication, strategic planning, and effective leadership, the superintendent ensures alignment with state and local priorities, establishing the foundation for continuous improvement in student achievement and district success.

Practices (Indicators):

The superintendent...

- A. Communicates the district’s vision, mission, and goals clearly and consistently to all stakeholders, ensuring understanding and engagement across the community.
- B. Ensures that the district’s identity—its vision, mission, values, and goals—drives decision-making and reflects the community’s culture and aspirations.
- C. Facilitates the implementation and monitoring of district strategic priorities informed by data and aligned with the Kentucky Board of Education and local priorities.
- D. Aligns financial resources with strategic goals to advance student learning and district improvement.
- E. Advocates for local, state, and national priorities to secure funding and influence policy aligned with the district’s vision and mission.

Artifacts:

1. District Improvement Plan

- Implementation and impact checks
- Agendas, updates, and “30-60-90-day” plans for tracking progress
- Vision/mission work aligned with strategic priorities
- Evidence of staff understanding the district’s direction

2. Strategic Planning Documentation and Progress Reports

- BOE retreat agendas, minutes, and work sessions
- Policy revisions and alignment with strategic priorities
- Goal-setting and monitoring using performance data
- Superintendent’s Professional Growth Plan (PGP)
- Documentation of advocacy efforts with policymakers and stakeholders

3. Financial Plans Aligned with District Priorities

- Financial reports and resource allocation are aligned with priorities
- Capital improvement plans
- Documentation of financial decisions supporting the improvement plan and strategic plan
- Evidence of collaboration with stakeholders to secure resources and funding

2. Instructional Leadership

Summary: The superintendent develops and sustains a district culture that prioritizes student learning. By fostering high expectations, instructional equity, and coherence, the superintendent ensures that all students receive the support they need to succeed, regardless of background. Instructional leadership engages educators, students, and families in the learning process, addresses the whole child's development, prepares them to meet the community's evolving needs, and adapts to the ever-changing landscape of technology to enhance instructional practices.

Practices (Indicators):

The superintendent...

- A. Fosters a district-wide commitment to continuous improvement and educational excellence while ensuring equitable systems, structures, and resources that support whole-child development.
- B. Aligns curriculum vertically and horizontally to ensure consistency, equitable access, and smooth student transitions across grade levels, reinforcing the expectation that all students can learn.
- C. Designs instructional programs, including effective virtual education models, that reflect the community's needs and prepare students for success in local and global contexts.
- D. Promotes professional learning, cultivates principals as instructional leaders, and innovative practices, including technology integration, to engage educators, students, and families in continuous improvement.
- E. Advocates for policies and funding that enhance instructional programs, particularly those addressing equity and access to advanced learning opportunities.

Artifacts:

1. Student Performance Data and Reports

- Formative and common assessment results, disaggregated by subgroups
- Longitudinal data tracking progress for all student groups
- Reports on interventions for underserved or underperforming populations
- Walk-through documents highlighting instruction and showing the implementation of district and school priorities

2. Professional Development Plans Tied to Instructional Goals

- Equity-focused professional development plans informed by data
- Records from meetings and training on inclusion and culturally responsive teaching
- Evidence of coaching and mentoring to support instructional strategies

3. Curriculum Alignment Documentation

- K-12 curriculum framework demonstrating vertical and horizontal alignment
- Improvement plans showing alignment with district goals and targeting performance gaps.
- Documentation of curriculum updates that are differentiated, culturally relevant, and aligned to local accountability measures for graduates
- Records of outreach efforts to align instructional programs with community and workforce needs

3. Cultural Leadership

Summary: The superintendent embraces the district's culture and traditions to create conditions for exemplary performance. By aligning the work of all stakeholders with the district's mission, the superintendent promotes equity, trust, and shared accountability, ensuring the district's culture supports the success of every student. The superintendent ensures the community has opportunities to provide input on local measures, aligning instructional practices and district priorities with community needs.

Practices (Indicators):

The superintendent...

- A. Communicates and exemplifies the district's core beliefs about teaching and learning, holding themselves to the highest standards as a visible model for stakeholders.
- B. Establishes a purpose with all stakeholders and equips all employees with the tools, resources, and clarity needed to positively influence student outcomes.
- C. Develops trust through collaboration and transparency, fostering a culture of shared accountability.
- D. Recognizes and celebrates district successes while addressing areas for growth, ensuring stakeholders feel valued and engaged in continuous improvement.
- E. Develops and maintains a regular cadence of communication to ensure consistent messaging about district priorities, finances, values, and achievements across all stakeholders.
- F. Creates opportunities for dialogue, shared decision-making, and conflict resolution with stakeholders through advisory councils, SBDM councils, forums, and community events.

Artifacts:

1. Stakeholder Engagement Documentation

- Survey results reflect involvement and feedback from students, staff, parents, and community groups
- Agendas and minutes of stakeholder meetings, advisory councils, and community engagement.
- Records of collaboration with civic organizations, businesses, and community groups
- Evidence of stakeholder involvement in key decision-making processes
- Documentation of a regular cadence of communication that ensures consistent messaging around district priorities, culture, and successes

2. Role Clarity and Impact Reports

- Student success drives the development of job descriptions and communication materials, ensuring roles are clearly aligned with district priorities and outcomes
- Evidence of training or development sessions focused on employee roles in influencing positive outcomes
- Surveys or feedback reports demonstrating stakeholder understanding of their purpose and impact

3. Celebrations and Recognition Events

- Records of student and staff recognition programs (e.g., awards ceremonies)
- Documentation of district-wide events celebrating accomplishments and milestones
- Messaging materials, such as opening day messages, that promote district culture and values
- Examples of storytelling initiatives highlighting partnerships and community contributions

4. Human Resource Leadership

Summary: The superintendent ensures the district is a professional learning community with effective systems for recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality staff. Through distributed leadership and fair evaluation practices, the superintendent establishes a supportive environment that prioritizes professional growth and accountability. The superintendent also ensures compliance with all federal and state employment laws through ongoing review and monitoring of district processes.

Practices (Indicators):

The superintendent...

- A. Oversees and monitors processes for hiring, inducting, and mentoring staff while fostering a positive work environment that supports retention and reflects staff feedback to improve the employee experience.
- B. Implements and monitors systems for fair and effective staff evaluations to improve performance.
- C. Plans for leadership succession to ensure continuity and alignment with district priorities while fostering a culture where succession planning cascades to all levels, including developing teacher leaders to support classroom and school-level stability.
- D. Regularly reviews and updates its employment processes to ensure compliance with all federal and state laws related to employment practices.

Artifacts:

1. Recruitment and Retention Data

- Job fair participation and hiring practices documentation
- Evidence of mentoring and induction programs to support new hires in all job classifications
- Staff retention data, including exit interview summaries and survey feedback
- Documentation of advocacy efforts to secure resources for competitive salaries and benefits

2. Professional Development and Leadership Development Plans

- Leadership development plans for district administrators and teacher leaders
- Participation records in mentoring, shadowing, and professional growth programs
- The superintendent monitors evaluation results and feedback analyses to define the next steps in staff development, measure improvement, and address trends that drive continuous growth across the organization
- Evidence of leadership succession planning to ensure long-term district capacity

3. Staff Evaluation Documentation

- Evaluation protocols and documentation demonstrating fair and consistent application
- Evidence of alignment between evaluations and district improvement goals
- Performance improvement plans and follow-up documentation for staff growth

5. Operational Leadership

Summary: The superintendent ensures the district's operations and resources are efficiently organized to support instructional priorities and student safety. By aligning systems for budgeting, facilities, and communication, the superintendent provides the operational stability required for the district's success. The superintendent also ensures ongoing communication with the Board about the district's financial stability and resource alignment with strategic priorities.

Practices (Indicators):

The superintendent...

- A. Develops, implements, and monitors comprehensive safety and emergency preparedness plans.
- B. Develops and oversees budgets that align resources with district goals and student needs.
- C. Ensures capital planning and facilities management reflect the priorities of student learning and safety.
- D. Establishes effective two-way communication systems that promote transparency, timely information sharing, and engagement with board members, employees, parents/guardians/families, and the community.
- E. Advocates for operational policies and funding to enhance district infrastructure and safety.

Artifacts:

1. Safety and Emergency Preparedness Plans

- Documentation of district-wide safety and crisis management plans
- Records of safety drills and training programs
- Evidence of collaboration with local and state safety agencies
- Emergency communication protocols, including weather-related updates, crisis alerts, and stakeholder notification systems

2. Budget and Resource Allocation Plans

- Annual and multi-year budgets aligned with strategic priorities, including regular reports to the Board of Education highlighting financial stability, projections, and funding priorities
- Evidence of financial decisions supporting equity initiatives, safety, and district goals
- Resource reallocation plans based on program reviews and improvement needs
- Documentation of communication plans that explain financial decisions, resource allocations, and budget priorities to staff and the community

3. Facilities and Capital Improvement Documentation

- Long-term facilities plans are aligned with district growth and safety needs
- Maintenance schedules and infrastructure updates
- Technology plans supporting instructional and operational goals
- Evidence of communication strategies related to capital projects, facilities updates, and infrastructure improvements (e.g., public updates, community forums, or newsletters)

Glossary of Key Terms for Board Members and Educators

Advisory Councils - Small, representative groups of stakeholders (students, staff, parents, community members) who provide input to the superintendent on district priorities, challenges, and opportunities.

Board of Education (BOE/Board) - A governing body elected or appointed to oversee the school district's policies, priorities, and financial decisions, working collaboratively with the superintendent to achieve district goals.

Cadence of Communication - A deliberate, structured schedule of messaging and engagement activities designed to ensure consistent, timely, and clear communication with all stakeholders.

Capital Improvement Plans - Long-term planning documents that outline significant investments in district facilities, infrastructure, and resources to support growth and operational stability.

Community Engagement - Active collaboration between the district and its stakeholders to build trust, strengthen partnerships, and promote shared decision-making in support of student success.

Data-Driven Decision Making - The process of using student performance data, community input, and other relevant metrics to inform strategic priorities, policies, and resource allocation.

Differentiated Instruction - An instructional approach that tailors teaching strategies, resources, and assessment methods to meet the diverse needs of students in the classroom.

Equity - Ensuring all students have access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed, regardless of their circumstances. Equity focuses on closing achievement gaps and removing systemic barriers.

Federal and State Employment Laws - Regulations governing hiring, workplace safety, anti-discrimination practices, and employee rights that the district must comply with to ensure fair treatment and legal adherence.

Formative Assessment - Ongoing evaluations during instruction that provide feedback to educators and students to improve learning and teaching practices.

Leadership Succession Planning - A strategic process to identify and prepare individuals for future leadership roles at all levels, ensuring stability and continuity within the district.

Monitoring - The continuous or periodic process of observing, measuring, and recording activities, systems, or data over time.

Professional Growth Plans (PGP) - Structured plans for the superintendent's ongoing learning and development, aligned with district goals and personal areas for improvement.

Stakeholders - Individuals and groups invested in the district's success, including students, parents, educators, staff, Board of Education members, community members, and external partners.

Strategic Priorities - The key goals and initiatives identified through data and stakeholder input that guide district decision-making and resource allocation.

Vertical and Horizontal Curriculum Alignment - Vertical alignment ensures that curriculum content builds logically across grade levels, while horizontal alignment guarantees consistency in what is taught and assessed across classrooms and schools at the same grade level.

Virtual/Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) - Flexible instructional models, often virtual or hybrid, designed to ensure student learning continues uninterrupted during emergencies or other situations where in-person instruction is not feasible.

Whole-Child Development - An approach to education that prioritizes academic achievement alongside the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of every student, preparing them for lifelong success.

Shaping the Superintendent Standards

The *KASA Next Generation Superintendent Effectiveness Standards (Revision 13)* was the foundation for developing this modernized framework. Building upon this established foundation, superintendents and current board members from across Kentucky collaborated to draft a document that reflects the evolving responsibilities and expectations of superintendents in today's educational landscape.

This revision process included input from a diverse range of educational leaders who worked to ensure the updated standards aligned with the needs of districts, communities, and the state's commitment to equity and excellence in education.

Over a 12-month pilot period, superintendents and boards of education from districts of varying sizes across Kentucky implemented this streamlined framework to evaluate superintendents' work. Their feedback was critical in refining the standards to ensure they were practical and impactful in guiding superintendent performance.

This ongoing collaboration underscores the commitment to continuous improvement and shared accountability for advancing the success of Kentucky's public education system.

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Ph. (502) 875-3411 | www.kasa.org