



EAB



(Re)Organizing for Excellence in the District Office

Presented by the District Leadership Forum

Welcome!
Introduce Yourself in the Chat!



Share your name,
district, and your role

Meet Your Presenters



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Connect with EAB



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Events for District Leaders

Superintendent Research Briefings

We summarize the latest research on K-12's biggest challenges to help district leaders *get smart* and *make progress*.

“

EAB's research and information are some of the best I've seen...
simple, concise, easy to understand.

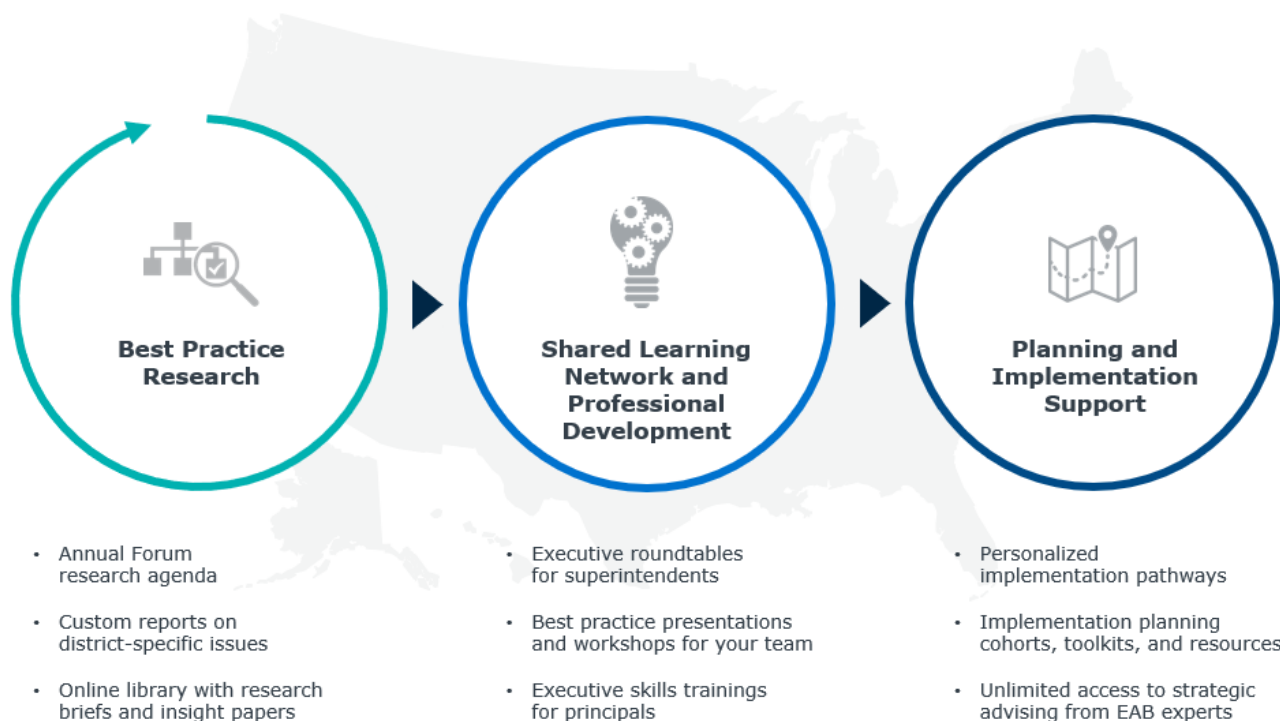
*Superintendent,
Missouri School District*

”



The District Leadership Forum

A Comprehensive Partnership Designed to Help District Leaders Accelerate Progress on Critical Challenges



Districts are Feeling the Weight of an Impossible Mandate

Districts Under Pressure to Solve a Long List of Complex Challenges With Few Resources



A Long List of Complex Challenges

Percentage of superintendents actively working on the following in 2023

Reading scores	76%
Math scores	77%
Disruptive behavior	70%
Mental health crises	95%
Chronic absenteeism	75%
Teacher morale and retention	78%

Dealing With Pressure From Every Angle



Parents

Confidence in public ed near all time low



Board members

Feeling high expectations and scrutiny after ESSERF



Employees

Frustrated with low pay, tough conditions

Too Little Capacity and Time



Team Stretched Thin

300% increase in time managing flashpoints over past 5 years



Principals Out of Depth

79% say prep programs were out of touch with reality of the role



Teachers Tapped Out

Reluctant to take on anything new

Working Together to Tackle Today's Most Pressing Challenges

6

Where Partners Have Directed Our Research So Far...

Select examples



Raising Early
Literacy Scores



Reducing Disruptive
Behavior



Raising
Teacher Morale



Minimizing Chronic
Absenteeism



Preventing Mental
Health Crises



Developing
Effective Principals



Closing College
Access Gaps



Integrating Career
Development



Managing District
Flashpoints

What We're Working on Next

Latest requested topics of focus

2024 Agenda



Navigating
Opportunities and
Pitfalls of AI



Building a High-
Performance District

2025 Agenda



Managing the
Changing Educator
Pipeline



Solving the Math
Readiness Equation

100+ issues addressed in our research library

Add Your Unique Perspective

EAB's 2025 Voice of the Superintendent Survey

Our annual initiative to elevate the superintendent experience focuses on four critical, evolving issues:

- Federal Policy Changes
- Funding Shifts
- School Board Relations
- Generative AI Adoption



TAKE THE SURVEY—
CLOSES APRIL 16TH



Thank you for your contribution!

Participants will receive early access to a full report with findings next month

EAB's Blueprint for a High-Performance District



Shared Vision + Goals

- A set of long-term district pillars + KPIs
- Annual strategy review to establish current progress, set next change objectives
- Strict prioritization of district change objectives
- Collaboration with principals to cascade objectives into schools

Role + Ownership Clarity

- Central office cabinet directly aligned with core district priorities
- School and district ownership of each initiative
- Contributing roles defined and documented
- Documentation of “superintendent worthy” roles

Hardwired Accountability

- Criteria for “greenlighting” district initiatives
- Definition and ongoing tracking of leading indicators
- “Tripwires” that trigger escalation and review of the strategy
- Transparent reporting on progress at regular intervals

Balance of Standards and Autonomy

- Criteria for what should be standardized
- Collaboration between principals to craft standardized processes
- Forums for sharing and workshopping individual practices that work

Data-Driven Decisions

- Documentation of use-cases for data across the district
- Shared terminology for data and sources
- Identifying and breaking down data silos for each use case
- Data-literacy training for all school/district staff

Outsized Investment in Leadership Development

- In-house training for change leadership skills
- Shared practices for effective collaboration
- Succession planning and mentoring
- Competency-based hiring processes

Continuous Focus on Teacher Engagement

- A systematic process for tracking and raising morale
- Engagement of teachers in crafting new initiatives
- Best-practice professional development
- Support to minimize low-value tasks

Practice of Sourcing and Sharing Innovations

- District support for “ground up” innovation efforts
- Campaigns to focus innovation on problems
- Scanning for external ideas
- Culture of recognizing and giving credit for ideas

Superintendents Focused on Building Capacity for Change

“

I strongly believe that building district capacity is our most important work as superintendents.

Superintendent, TX

”

“

Without a focused approach to building systems, we will continue to do “random acts of education.”

Superintendent, IL

”

“

We can't just think “one problem at a time.” We need to build a district that can tackle anything.

Superintendent, IN

”

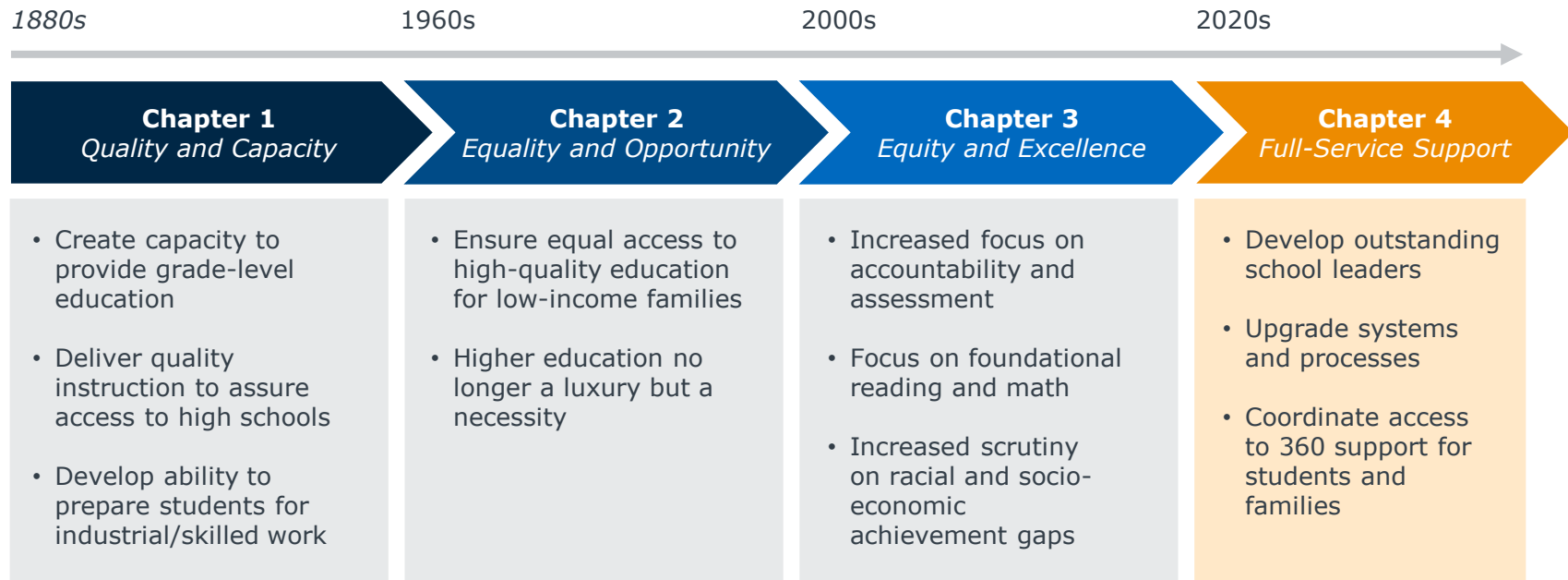
Today's Agenda

- 1 Discuss why central office design is top-of-mind for many superintendents today
- 2 Share four recommendations for improving central office alignment and efficiency
- 3 Provide reflection questions to help superintendents identify opportunities for improvement

Entering a New Chapter for Central Office Purpose and Design



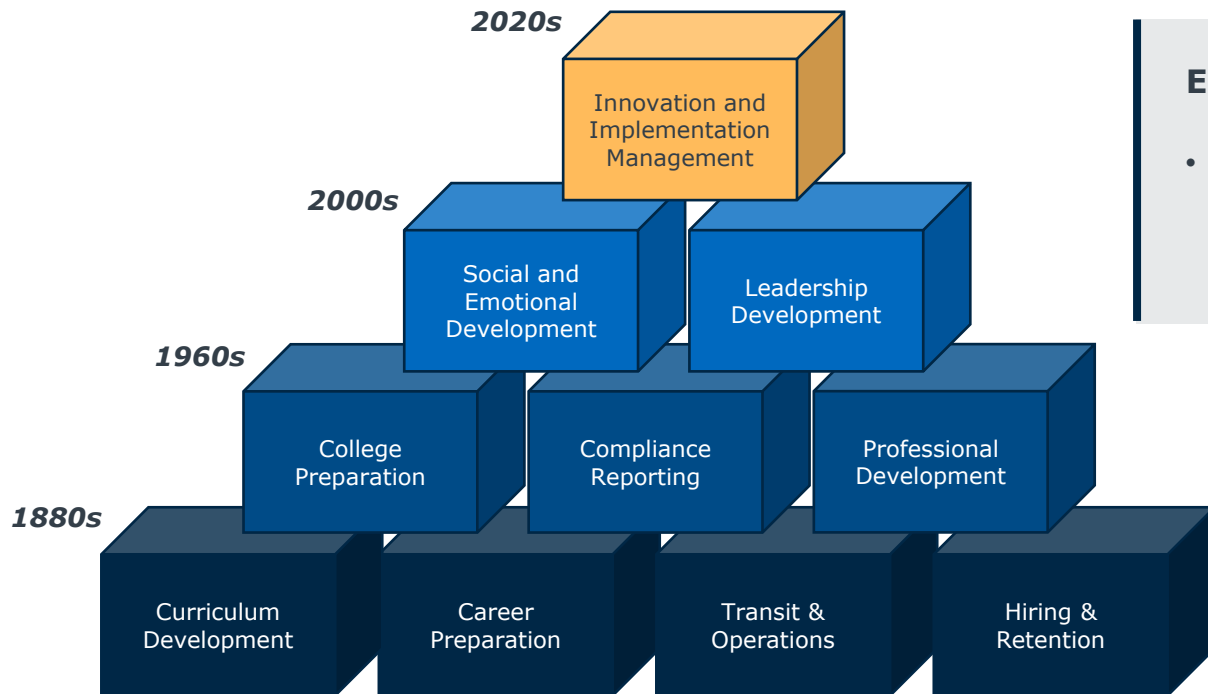
A Simplified Chronology of District Office Responsibilities



Source: EAB Interviews and Analysis

As Focus Changes, Responsibilities Accumulate

Changes in District Expectations and Ambitions Add More Necessary Functions to The Pile



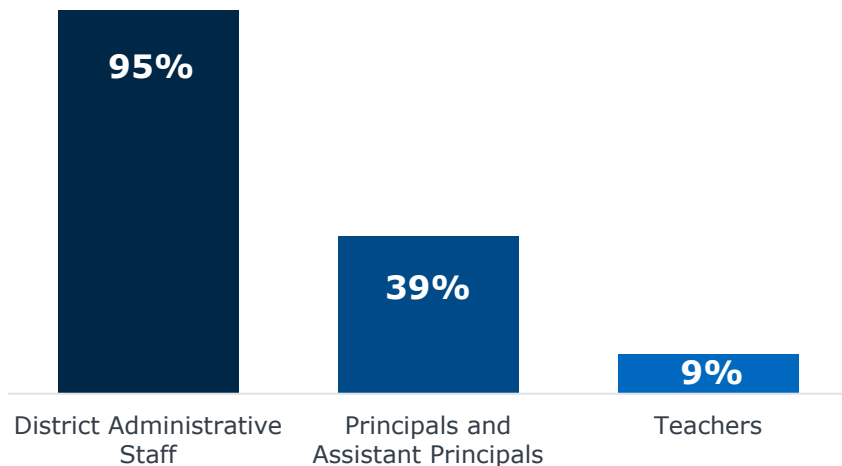
Essential Question

- Which of these responsibilities is getting easier?

Many Districts Added Centralized Staff to Meet Expanding Demands

But Growth Has Been Reactive to Need Rather Designed With the Future in Mind

**Percentage increase in the number of staff
by position type, 2000 – 2022 (NCES)**



More Staff Does Not Always Equal More Capacity

“Where growth in district leadership teams has occurred, it’s been organic or in reaction to a need, rather than by design. I think a lot of [superintendents] are starting to ask what the right structure looks like.”

~Superintendent, Southwest District

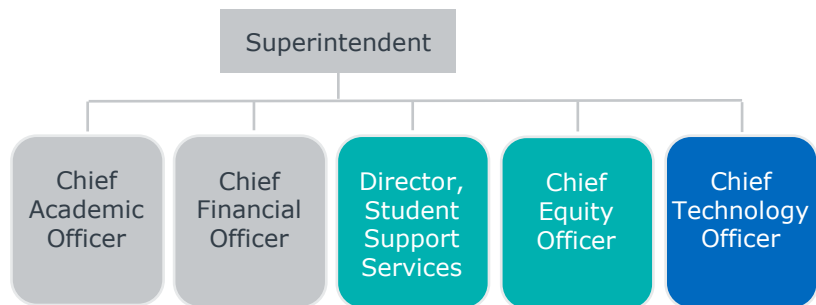
Source: National Center for Educational Statistics (2022), Staff employed in public elementary and secondary school systems, by type of assignment: Selected school years, 1949-50 through fall 2021; EAB Interviews and Analysis

What Does “Organic Growth” Look Like in District Offices?



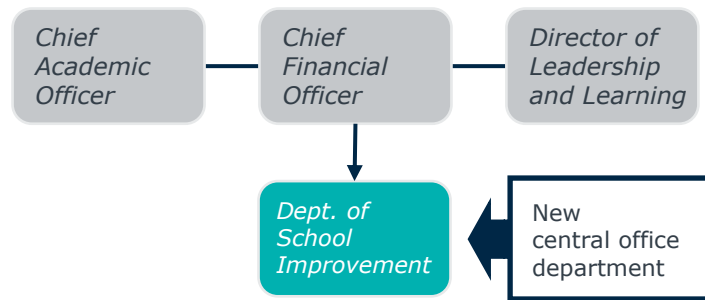
1. New Roles and Added Responsibilities as Needs and Priorities Expand

1880s
■ = New(er) roles ■ = Expanded responsibilities



2. Reporting Lines Assigned by Capacity Rather Than Design

Real example



Frequently Observed Pitfalls Districts Fall Into Due Through Reactive Expansion



Overlapping job descriptions



Budget-driven title-level variation



Superintendents have up to 17 direct reports



Reporting lines don't align with cabinet roles

Consequences of Organic Growth Felt Daily in District Work



What You Want in a High-Performing Team

Clearly defined ownership
of district priorities



Efficient decision-making and
initiative management



Outsized investment of time and resources in
the the most impactful initiatives and issues



Senior leaders spend most of their
time on “top of license” activities



What We See in District Offices Nationwide



Most questions go straight to the
principal or superintendent



Initiatives and decisions managed by
large committees with “shared ownership”



Everyone struggling
with prioritization



Senior leaders spending too much time
in the weeds on low value tasks

Four Recommendations for Reclaiming Efficiency and Efficacy



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How to Elevate Central Office Performance

1. Define what, not who, needs a seat at the table

2. Establish roles, not committees, for initiatives

3. Use categories, not lists, for prioritization

4. Create criteria for when to “do” and when to delegate

100+ Strategic Plans Show Common Priorities for Schools

Consistent Categories Reflect Community Expectations for Strong School District Today

Where Are School Districts Focused Today?

*Percent of Districts Citing the Following¹
as a Strategic Pillar/Goal (n=100)*



Core Values

Equity

Innovation

“It doesn’t matter whether you’re running a school district of 700 students or 7000 students. The expectations from your community remain the same.”

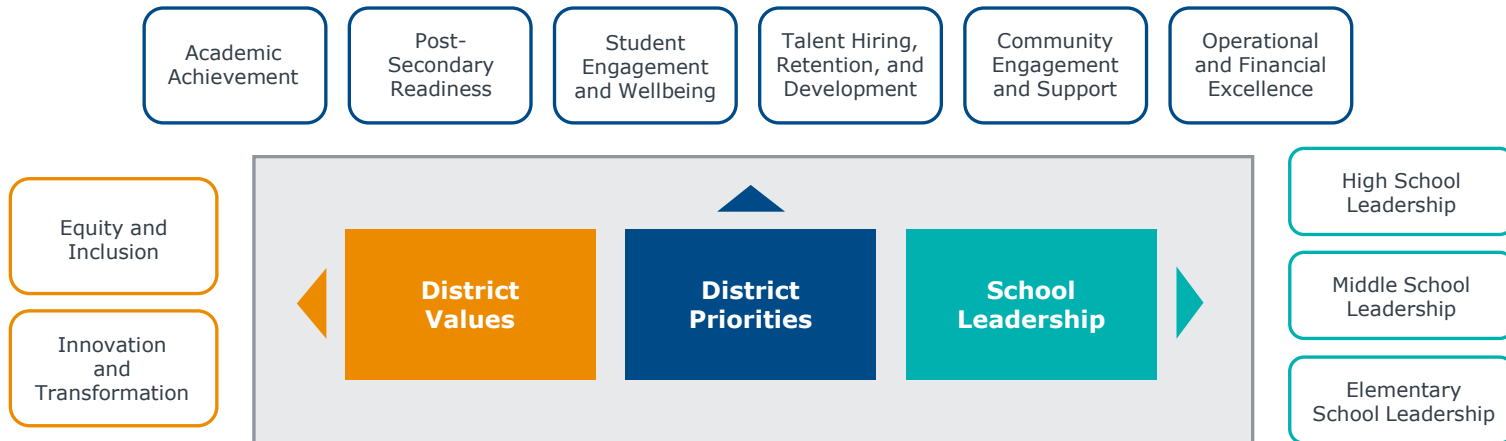
~ Superintendent, NY

To Establish Organizational Clarity, Define Responsibilities Before Roles

18

Question #1: What Needs a Seat at the Table?

Three Categories of Responsibilities Require Visible Ownership and Representation



Question #2: Who is Accountable for Each Responsibility?

Large district = 10-12 Cabinet Members + Chief of Staff

Small district = 2-4 Cabinet Members + school and teacher leaders

Reflecting on Your District's Alignment

Clearly defined ownership of district priorities

Reflection Questions

Do the priorities on slide 14 match those of our district?

If not, how do they differ?

Have we clarified executive ownership of each priority within our senior leadership team? And do job descriptions reflect those responsibilities?

Have we communicated executive ownership of district priorities?

Is it easy for community members to find who is accountable for each?

Do reporting lines for central office positions and departments align with each cabinet member's job description?

Yes

No

Unsure

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

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The Hidden Costs of K-12's Approach to Advancing Change



What We Believe

"Everyone deserves a seat at the table"

Participation in planning seen as necessary to further individual or departmental agendas

"Every idea is a good idea"

Culture of inclusion fosters belief that every contribution has equal merit

"We've got to all be on board"

Complete consensus viewed as the only way to move ideas beyond committee meetings

How We Operate

Leadership by Committee



"We strive to create a culture of shared leadership and accountability. It's important that teachers and staff feel agency in our efforts to move the district forward."

~Superintendent, SC

What We Get



False Inclusion

The loudest voices are over-reflected in plans and actions



Groupthink

Committees tend to produce the least controversial ideas



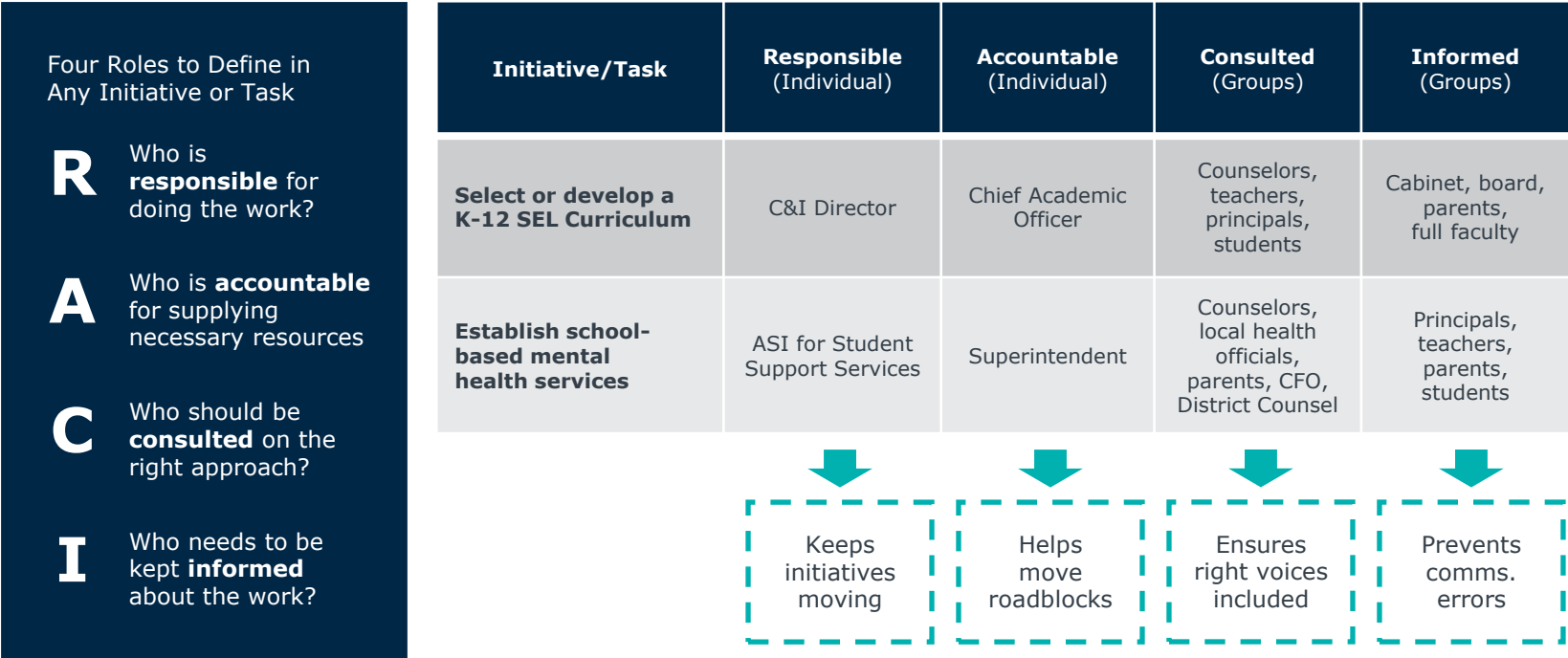
Slow Progress

+36%

Time to completion when adding an additional "owner" to an initiative.

How to Include the Right Voices in the Right Way

Use “RACI” Charts to Clarify Who Should Contribute to Initiatives or Tasks, and How



Reflecting on Your District's Alignment

Efficient decision-making and initiative management

Reflection Questions	Yes	No	Unsure
Do any of the problems with initiative committees align with our experience? Can we cite examples of the loudest voices winning, groupthink, or slow progress?	☐	☐	☐
Is there a current initiative that we could apply the RACI framework to as a test? If so, which?	☐	☐	☐
Would we anticipate push-back when introducing this framework to our leadership team? If so, what concerns do we expect to hear?	☐	☐	☐

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Is K-12's Biggest Problem Simply Trying to Do Too Much?



The Problem With Prioritization is No Secret

90%+

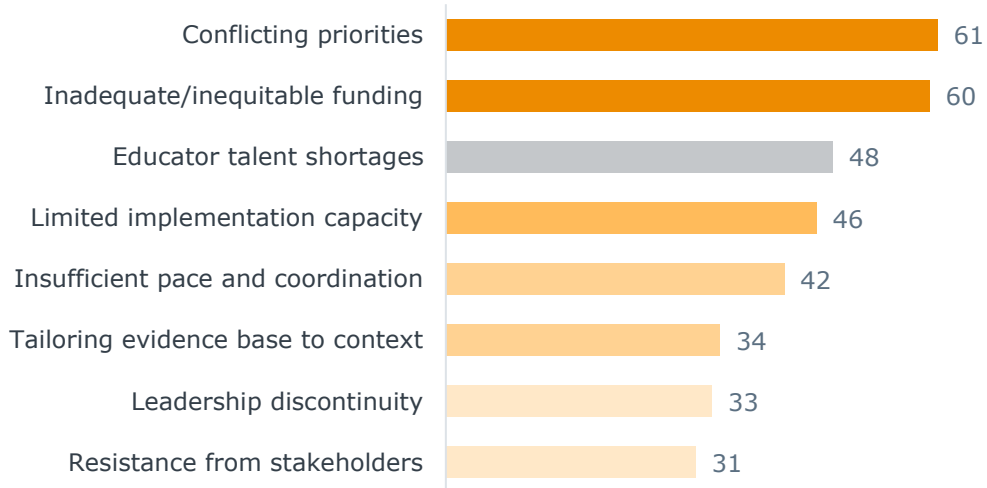
of K-12 leaders cite prioritization as a constant challenge

>3 = X

Management of more than three initiatives increases rates of burnout and failure

Why K-12 Transformation Efforts Fail

% of times each issue was listed in the top 5 for all transformations (n=422)



Outdated Practices Fail to Protect Leaders From Distractions

Priority Lists Fall Short When Determining and Communicating How to Spend Time and Resources

District To-Do List (How most leaders prioritize)

- ☐ Raise reading scores
- ☐ Pass bond referendum
- ☐ Get to 90% of students at 90% ADA
- ☐ Reduce teacher turnover rates
- ☐ Decrease disruptive behavior
- ☐ Strengthen principal development
- ☐ Reduce student mental health crises
- ☐ Figure out policies for A.I.

Three Things Priority Lists Don't Do...



Direct investment of time and resources



Protect time from additional requests



Communicate what you're not going to work on (at least not yet)

Organizing Priorities Into Categories Solves All Three Problems

Categories for Objectives

Variables		Critical	Important	Desirable
	Expectations	Fixed	Best we can achieve	Fixed
	Resources	First allocation of time and funds	Fixed	When can be spared
	Timeline	Fixed	Fixed	Flexible
Number of Objectives		1	2-3	Remaining

Rules of Engagement

Critical Objective

First allocation of time and resources. Senior leader spends time here every day.

Important Objective

Dedicated owners assigned and given fixed resources based on available funds.

Desirable Objective

Time and resources will be allocated if and when they become available.

What's the one thing, if achieved, that will have the greatest positive impact on everything else?

Reflecting on Your District's Alignment

Outsized investment of time and resources in the the most impactful initiatives and issues

Reflection Questions

Can you name the "critical" objective for your district this year?

If so, do all members of your leadership team give the same answer?

☐
☐
☐

Can you name the 2-3 "important" objectives for your district this year?

Again, do all members of your leadership team give the same answers?

☐
☐
☐

Do those 3-4 objectives align with where your team is spending the majority of their time and resources? If not, what's getting in the way?

☐
☐
☐

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To Maximize Your Impact, Define When to Do and When to Delegate



The Most Effective Superintendents Resist the Temptation to Dive In

Superintendent's Dilemma

“

I'm a “doer” to the core.

When I first became a superintendent, I was miserable. But I've learned that my job is now to empower others and get out of their way.

I've had to train my team to make me stay out of the weeds.”

~ Superintendent, TX

EAB's Delegation Criteria Checklist

Delegate tasks that receive more than two “Yes” responses

Task: *Crafting a recommendation for district-wide cell phone policy*

Delegation Criteria	Yes	No
Is it faster for me to delegate?	✓	
Is it an opportunity to build trust with leaders?	✓	
Is it an opportunity to develop administrators' leadership skills?	✓	
Is it an opportunity to empower other leaders?	✓	
Is another leader closer to the problem than I am?	✓	
Is it mostly straightforward but tedious?		✓
Could I simply provide oversight or feedback close to the end?		
Is it something I could teach to someone?		
Is it something at which I am not skilled?		
Is there a process or steps someone else could replicate?		

Reflecting on Your District's Alignment

Senior leaders spend most of their time on "top of license" activities

Reflection Questions

Have you created criteria for what you should do, and when to delegate?

If so, have you discussed those criteria with your team?

Yes

No

Unsure

☐
☐
☐

Does your team have permission to tell you when you're "in the weeds?"

If so, how have you created safety for them to raise that concern?

☐
☐
☐

Where do you find yourself wanting to get in the weeds, but shouldn't?"

Does getting involved convey lack of trust, or provide a safe outlet to get involved?

Open response

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Hardwire Your District for High-Performance

A Three-Part Process to Assess Current Practices, Pain Points, and Opportunities for Improvement



Maturity Diagnostic Consult

- EAB experts assess 16 criteria across five characteristics of high-functioning central office teams
- Central office teams are assigned a maturity score for each component and overall organization



Team Perspectives Survey

- Leadership team completes brief survey designed to identify top pain points in central office functioning
- Team scores help identify most urgent opportunities for improvement

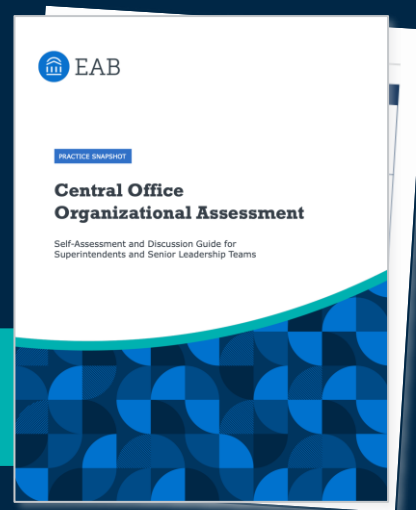


Results and Prioritization Consult

- Customized report analyzes maturity and urgency scores to determine greatest areas of challenge
- EAB expert reviews findings with central office team and selects 1-2 priority areas to address in the coming 12 months

Ready to Start?

Talk to an expert about signing up for our Central Office Summer Cohort



Voices from the Field: The Central Office Cohort Experience

“

The cohort gave us the chance to **commit time to our organizational** efforts. We got to identify where our efforts working, and where we could benefit from realignment.

Superintendent, OK

”

“

I valued the opportunity to work with EAB on how we can get better at prioritizing our central office work—we can now **dedicate our precious time to our most important work.**

Superintendent, IL

”

“

This work is so **critical to the development of our strategic plan.** EAB ensured that our long-term goals are grounded in data-driven insights and aligned with our district priorities.

Superintendent, MI

”

You're Invited! In-person, Deep Discussion on Today's Top Issues



EAB Roundtables Provide the Professional Development District Leaders Designed for Themselves

Executive Roundtables in Brief

Closed-door executive sessions for superintendents to engage in bold, honest conversations about struggles, future visioning, and practical solutions



- ▶ **Two days of protected time** for deep-divide discussion on key issues with peers
- ▶ **First access to EAB's latest research**, with implications for leadership, policy, and strategy
- ▶ **Starting in late spring** as the perfect preparation for summer planning



The best professional development I've received in 30 years as an educator.
Superintendent, Midwest District

2025 Research Agenda

Adapting to a Changing Landscape



Bridging the Foundational Math Knowledge Gap

- Correct common misconceptions about evidence-based math instruction for today's students
- Learn how to build a skill recovery system and equip teachers to teach math confidently and effectively
- [Read more](#) about our early findings!



Managing the Changing Educator Pipeline

- Discover innovative tactics for attracting prospective educators to your district
- Explore successful, alternative ways to streamline entry into teaching, especially for high-needs positions

Registration Now Open for 2025 Roundtable Sessions

April 29-30

Washington, DC

June 10-11

Washington, DC

July 16-17

Chicago, IL

REGISTER

*Sessions are limited to District Superintendents.
Registration is limited to one attendee per institution.*

How Else Can We Help?



I'd like to speak with someone further to...

- 1 Join the next Central Office Organizational cohort
- 2 Save my seat at a summer Superintendent Roundtable
- 3 Learn about other supportive services through a District Leadership Forum partnership
- 4 Something else? Choose this option and we will follow up with you

A Quick Ask



We value your feedback.

Please take a few minutes to **complete the short survey** in your web browser.

Thank you!



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