

# **PRINCIPAL SUCCESSION PLANNING**

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Succession planning contributes to the success of the organization through effective hiring, developing, orienting and evaluating the principal. Effective boards will lead principal succession successfully by planning a continuum of succession planning process. Succession planning is an ongoing process, aligned with the organization's vision, needs and strategic direction.

## **SHORT BIO**

Necva Ozgur is the founder and Executive Director of MERIT and the founding School Head of New Horizon School Pasadena, NHSP. Necva obtained an M.S. degree from the School of Pharmacy at the University of Istanbul and later, an M.A. degree in Human Development from Pacific Oaks College in California, where she wrote her thesis on *Strategies to Achieve Excellence in an Islamic School*.

Necva played a pivotal role in establishing NHSP and lead the school to get its accreditation from WASC and CAIS. With the leadership and guidance of Necva, NHSP earned the Blue Ribbon recognition from the Department of Education. Necva is currently providing Islamic schools with board training, principal coaching, accreditation, school establishment, development and evaluation and consulting. She chaired many accreditation teams on behalf of different accrediting agencies. Currently, she is chairing a committee for a pioneer project of developing Islamic school standards for joint accreditation with AdvancED on behalf of ISNA. Necva recently developed a program called Academy of Islamic Thought for the Islamic Center of Southern California.

## **OUTLINE**

### **STAGE I: BEFORE THE PRINCIPAL ANNOUNCES THAT HE/SHE DECIDED TO LEAVE ON-GOING SUCCESSION PLANNING**

- Step 1: Understand the Job of the Principal
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- Step 3: Define the Mutual Expectations of the Principal and the Board
- Step 4: Design and Implement a Constructive Evaluation of the Principal
- Step 5: Develop and Implement a Productive Board Evaluation Process
- Step 6: Create a Supportive Environment for the Principal to Be Successful
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- Step 8: Define the Core Leadership and Management Competencies

### **STAGE II: AFTER THE PRINCIPAL ANNOUNCES THAT HE/SHE DECIDED TO LEAVE SEARCH PROCESS**

- Step 1: Establish a Search Committee
- Step 2: Develop a Plan of Action

## **SEARCH PROCESS**

- Step 1: Establish a Search Committee
- Step 2: Develop a Plan of Action
- Step 3: Develop a Calendar with a Timeline
- Step 4: Prepare all the Written Documents for Principal Search
- Step 5: Prepare a Job Announcement
- Step 6: Prepare a School Information Package
- Step 7: Screen Initial Inquiries
- Step 8: Arrange First Interviews
- Step 9: Arrange for Candidates To Visit the School
- Step 10: Select the Top Candidates and Offer the Contract

## **STAGE III: AFTER THE BOARD SELECTS THE NEW PRINCIPAL SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION**

- Step 1: Announce the Appointment
- Step 2: Consider a Leadership Transition Team or a Principal Coach
- Step 3: Provide a Formal Orientation Program for the Principal
- Step 4: Supporting the New Principal
- Step 5: Define the Role of the Outgoing Principal in Succession Planning

## **PRINCIPAL SUCCESSION PLANNING**

**This information is adapted from *Chief Executive Succession Planning* by Nancy R. Axelrod**

### **An Introduction**

The announcement from the principal that he/she wishes to move on, a sudden or unexpected departure, or the board's awareness of the need for new leadership are occasions to prompt boards to an urgent principal search. Failure to plan for succession well in advance can result in chaos and create costly delays in organizational momentum and progress. Effective boards understand that principal turnover is inevitable and the best way to ensure a smooth and successful transition is to anticipate it and to plan for it. However, most schools do not plan ahead and struggle to find the right successors when this leadership vacuum occurs. Most of the time schools respond in two ways to leadership change:

1. Immediately identify someone to fill the position.
2. Secretly prepare a successor for the principal transition.

Neither of these options adequately prepares the school to face challenges of the leadership transition. Successions should not pose a crisis, but instead present an opportunity to formulate a school's objectives and to develop a cadre of leaders who can execute them.

One of the most difficult discussions for both board members and the principals is succession planning. Boards avoid this subject because they worry that the principal will be offended that the board is considering replacing him/her. Principals avoid the subject because they worry that the board might think that the principal is giving a message that he/she is planning to leave. Succession planning should be an open dialog for the benefit of all the concerned parties.

Planning for a successful principal transition is called succession planning, which is a proactive process of setting the stage for a smooth transition and ensuring the school has strong leadership. Succession planning can strategically prepare the school for success before an unforeseen departure of a principal. Succession planning is not simply replacement planning. It is also a systematic leadership development plan to groom

setting the stage for a smooth transition and ensuring the school has strong leadership. Succession planning can strategically prepare the school for success before an unforeseen departure of a principal. Succession planning is not simply replacement planning. It is also a systematic leadership development plan to groom potential leadership talents during a principal's tenure. It goes beyond the basic question of selecting replacements for positions. While replacement planning finds backups to fill vacancy of the principal, succession planning also grooms talent for the future. Succession planning should encompass a dialogue about leadership in the school, what characteristics define it, who displays it, who has the potential to display it, and how to transition from the former to the latter. The planning should elicit the opinions of the school community.

Succession planning contributes to the success of the organization through effective hiring, developing, orienting and evaluating the principal. Effective boards will lead principal succession successfully by planning a continuum of succession planning process. Succession planning is an ongoing process, aligned with the organization's vision, needs and strategic direction.

Although there isn't a one-size fit succession plan to fit every school and every circumstance, the following three-stage succession plan is considered as an effective plan.

Stage I: Before the principal announces that he/she decided to leave: On-going succession planning

Stage II: After the principal announces that he/she decided to leave: Search process

Stage III: After the board selects the new principal

## **STAGE I: BEFORE THE PRINCIPAL ANNOUNCES THAT HE/SHE DECIDED TO LEAVE: ON-GOING SUCCESSION PLANNING**

Succession planning should be a proactive rather than reactive approach to school leadership transition. Succession planning works best when board members and the principal collaborate in advance to create the conditions for a successful leadership transition, whether or not it is expected in the near future. Some of the steps described here should be revisited annually or as needed.

### **Step 1: Understand the Job of the Principal**

Serving as the principal of the Islamic school can be the most frustrating and stressful job and at the same time, the most satisfying and intrinsically rewarding job. A demand of serving multicultural communities adds to the already challenging multidimensional responsibilities of the Islamic school principal. The principals must play multiple roles, cope with complexities, and uncertainty, embody their organization's mission, and guide the vision. Like most leaders, they are expected to do a lot in little time, often make unpopular decisions, understand the needs and concerns of a wide-range of stakeholders, and model the behavior and values expected of others. Boards need to find ways to support their principals and provide a climate for them to succeed.

### **Step 2: Develop a Leadership Transition Plan to use in Emergency Situation**

One of the most unsettling events in the lifecycle of an organization is a change within the principal leadership position. Even when it is planned, the stakes and the uncertainty are high. When it is not planned, there is a greater chance actions taken to deal with the sudden, unexpected absence of the principal will be alarming to the school's stakeholders and the board should have an emergency transition management contingency plan in place to foster continuity and ensure stability during this time. An effective emergency leadership transition plan provides clarity on who will do what in the event that the principal cannot perform his/her essential duties. Having the following information in one place will provide board members with the tools and the contacts they need to ensure effective management during an unexpected leadership transition.

#### **. Communication Plan**

Who is the first point of contact in the event of change in the principal's situation? Most of the time this person will be the board chair. The board chair will call an emergency board meeting to notify all the board members and discuss the next steps. The board will discuss the next steps. Once the plan of action has been determined, a message from the board chair should be sent to the school's key stakeholders detailing the plan.

#### **. Interim Management**

The board needs to decide who will be the board designee to perform the principal's essential duties while the board conducts a search for a new principal. There are three options:

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2. An acting principal appointed by the board to provide leadership during the principal search process. This might be a senior manager or a board member.
3. An interim principal who will be hired for a year by the board to provide leadership during the principal search process. This interim principal might apply and be considered as a candidate for the principal position.

### **C. Financial Oversight**

Having multiple signatories on the school's accounts enables business to continue in the principal's absence. These signatories might be the board chair secretary or the treasurer.

### **D. Executive Search**

While interim management is in place, the board is likely to work with a search consultant or search committee. What will be the next action items for the board to consider? What is the proper delegation of authority between the search committee and the board?

## **Step 3: Define the Mutual Expectations of the Principal and the Board**

A Constructive partnership

"Exceptional boards recognize that they cannot govern well without the chief executive's collaboration and that the chief executive cannot lead the organization to its full potential without the board's unflagging support."

-- *Twelve Principles of Governance that Power Exceptional Boards*, BoardSource, 2005.

According to research conducted by BoardSource, in executive transitions, a striking number of chief executives depart as a result of unarticulated feuds with board members. These disagreements can simmer beneath the surface for long periods of time until they are revealed when the chief executive resigns or is dismissed. Islamic schools are not exempt from these unfortunate circumstances. Islamic school principals and the boards should find civil ways to bring their disputes to the surface in order to diagnose underlying conflicts, before the conflicts undermine governance.

In non-profit organizations, leadership is shared between the board and the executive director/principal. The compatibility of the board-chair and the principal is critical for the successful running of the organization. The relationship between the board and the principal is the most critical factor in determining the success of the school. Effective and healthy board/principal partnership starts with mutual trust and respect. Mutual trust and respect are built on open and honest communication and avoiding hidden agendas, secrecy and side talks. Agreement and clarity about roles and responsibilities and how to work together is crucial for professional and cordial relationships. A rule of "no surprises" should always be respected. The principal and the board members have the responsibility to support each other and to demonstrate that support publicly and privately. Disagreements should be resolved behind closed doors; "praise publicly, criticize privately".

Succession planning is not static. The players keep changing as board members, board officers and principals. As organizations undergo changes in institutional strategy, environmental conditions, and people, boards and principals need to communicate regularly about the mutual expectations they have of one another. It is especially important to revisit expectations when the chief executive or the board finds that there is too much ambiguity surrounding their roles or when a conscious effort is needed to clarify respective roles in areas in which more than one group has authority. Clarity on mutual expectations between the board and the principal will eliminate the gray areas especially in overlapping areas. While the players, the environment, and the rules of engagement are likely to change, the need for a strong, constructive relationship between the board and the principal does not. The following chart helps to clarify the role of the board and the principal.

## **Step 4: Design and Implement a Constructive Evaluation of the Principal**

"Boards should not underestimate their role in chief executive job satisfaction. Many chief executives find boards personally helpful and a resource rather than an obstacle for getting things done. Chief executives who have a written evaluation are more satisfied with their jobs. Furthermore, chief executives who give their boards an effective rating have greater job satisfaction than those who give their boards an ineffective rating."

--BoardSource Governance Index 2007.

The purpose of the performance evaluation is to measure the effectiveness of the principal and ensure that the principal's performance conforms to the job description, leadership qualities, annual goals, and school's strategic priorities. The evaluation process should allow both the board and the principal the opportunity to identify areas of competence and excellence, as well as any areas of further growth and improvement. The

The purpose of the performance evaluation is to measure the effectiveness of the principal and ensure that the principal's performance conforms to the job description, leadership qualities, annual goals, and school's strategic priorities. The evaluation process should allow both the board and the principal the opportunity to identify areas of competence and excellence, as well as any areas of further growth and improvement. The evaluation process provides oversight and assurance that the policies are being effectively implemented. The evaluation process provides opportunities to identify the areas of improvement, which will guide the plans for professional development. The evaluation process also provides critical data for contract extension as well as termination if necessary. Agreeing in advance on a principal evaluation assessment process as part of the succession planning process provides a framework for a regular dialogue between the board and the principal. Ideally, this agreement on the process to be used is reached at the time the principal is selected. During the hiring process the meeting will take place between the board and the principal to start the dialogue for the principal evaluation process, agree on evaluation tools, and timelines.

#### **Step 5: Develop and Implement a Productive Board Evaluation Process**

A hallmark of effective succession planning is a regular, periodic process for reviewing and strengthening the board's effectiveness. Boards that have engaged in continuous learning and self-improvement are not only better positioned to attract qualified candidates during the principal search, they are more likely to anticipate and navigate a leadership transition. Boards that suffer from passivity, complacency, or micromanaging behavior are less likely to encourage the best candidates during the principal search. They may also find it difficult to retain the best and brightest principals.

Performance evaluations should be based on the stated purpose and mission of the school. The most productive form of evaluation is one that is based on a review setting measurable goals and accomplishing them. Major elements of evaluation should be praise, support, encouragement of good work and recommendations and suggestions for improvement. Evaluations should deal with issues, not rumors, opinions and personalities.

#### **Step 6: Create a Supportive Environment for the Principal to be Successful**

Board members exert the greatest influence in creating the conditions and supportive environment to help the principal succeed. Performance review of both the board and the principal provides critical succession planning opportunities to clarify goals for the school, the principal and the board. Whether the board uses performance assessments to support and nurture the principal, to provide opportunities for constructive feedback as well as positive reinforcement for the board or the principal, or to bring a successful principal's service to a graceful end, they are important tools for succession thinking.

Conflicts with boards arising from individual board members who act as quasi-administrators, represent special interests or hidden agendas, or undermine their principal represent common but unstated reasons for principal job dissatisfaction and resignation. Many Islamic schools experience high principal turnover because the board has either under-governed or micromanaged. Schools with high principal turnover need to stop and ask themselves whether the governance model or the execution of that model impede the retention of qualified principals or turn off qualified candidates from applying for the position. When principal turnover is high, the board should not be too quick to start a search for the new principal until the source of governance problem has been diagnosed and addressed. When succession planning is continuous, remedies for problems or dysfunctional practices can be identified and often implemented in advance of the principal search phase of succession planning.

To ensure that the school will offer a competitive compensation package, the board should review national and regional principal surveys and make discreet phone calls to compare compensation levels with peer schools of similar scope. At least once a year boards should review not only the principal's salary and the benefit packages, but also potential revisions that will contribute to a high performer's job satisfaction. The board should ensure that the principal has an adequate amount of annual leave and insist that vacations are taken. The principal should be encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities that provide him/her with professional growth. The board's support of the principal is especially important in times of conflict. The principal is often under siege when executing controversial policies the board has approved. This is not the time for the board to detach from the principal or the policy, but rather to help the principal manage the conflict.

#### **Step 7: Determine Where the School Currently Is and Where It Wants to Go**

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### **Step 7: Determine Where the School Currently Is and Where It Wants to Go**

The first step in principal search is not the search for the new principal but a search for where the school wants to go. One of the keys to successful principal transition is a thoughtful process that begins when the board takes the time to understand the organization's current and future challenges, strengths and needs. Unfortunately, too many boards in quest of new principals start in the middle of the process, moving too quickly into the stage of identifying the qualities the ideal candidate should possess before defining strategic institutional issues and priorities. Successful succession planning enables the board to clarify the school's strategic directions, the school culture it aspires to sustain, and the kind of leadership that will advance its mission and vision prior to the search and selection process. The board should address these issues first when the principal transition is required. This organizational assessment stage enables the board to gather the information needed to prepare a profile of the next principal and to determine if board members share a common view of the school's priorities and directions.

While the board has the ultimate responsibility for evaluating the present condition of the school, the challenges on the horizon, and the future direction of the school, input from other key constituencies can provide the board with a fresher and wider perspective. Also, staff members can provide valuable perspectives on the needs of the school and the style of leadership required. Boards should provide safe forums for staff members, especially those who will report directly to the principal, to make candid suggestions on the school's leadership needs and challenges. This is also a good time to get feedback from parents and community members. Ideally, the board should take as long as it needs to undertake the organizational assessment well before it begins to look for a principal. If the school has not engaged in strategic planning process or needs more time to conduct the institutional assessment, it might be better to appoint an interim principal to enable the board to complete this process thoroughly than to jump into the search for candidates too quickly. The organizational assessment process might begin with a survey and SWOT Analysis and end with a retreat dedicated to reviewing the school's strategic priorities and objectives that emerge from the survey results. Schools in the midst of strategic planning when a principal transition occurs will have to decide whether or not to defer strategic planning to allow the new principal to contribute to the results of such an important endeavor.

Each school will have different needs and circumstances that affect the principal transition. A confidential survey of key stakeholders can provide the search committee with important feedback on the strengths and challenges the next principal must tackle and identify the needs of the school with the leadership skills and qualities needed in the next principal.

### **Step 8: Define the Core Leadership and Management Competencies**

One of the board's important succession planning transactions will be to convert the results of the organizational assessment into a meaningful set of personal and professional competencies that match the school's core needs. There are some qualities that every nonprofit leader needs: commitment to the cause, stamina, judgment, strength of character, and a mastery of basic management skills in finance, human resources, communications, and administrative skills. If the right questions have been addressed during the organizational assessment phase, the emerging profile of the organization's current needs and where it must go creates a portrait for the kind of professional leadership required to help take it there.

To determine which leadership competencies are most essential to the organization's success, focus on the strategic imperatives that emerge from the organizational assessment. Does it reveal that the organization most needs a visionary who can frame strategy, drive innovation, and radically grow the organization? Or do the results of the assessment highlight a need for a seasoned manager who can provide stability and strength to the organization? Will the organization need primarily a turnaround expert who can restructure and rehabilitate an organization? Or does it need a leader who can take a good organization to new heights by securing new financing and forging new alliances? Does the new principal need to be a transformational change-agent who can navigate the turbulent passages required to keep the organization robust and responsive to dramatic changes in the market it serves? Or does he/she need to bring skills to promote stability during unpredictable times? Although the tempting answer would be "all of the above", boards need to be realistic and understand that no one will have strengths in all the areas and only a few principals will be equally gifted in all of the leadership requirements that emerge from an organizational assessment. The goal is to develop a highly focused, relevant, and authentic list of qualifications connecting the school's needs to the requirements of the best qualified available candidate. Once the board has taken the time to determine the organization's present condition and its future needs, it will be able to create the principal profile.

### **CORE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES FOR PRINCIPALS**

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## CORE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES FOR PRINCIPALS

The following core leadership and management competencies provide the framework for the boards. There are 14 different leadership roles played by the principal.

### I. PRINCIPAL AS A LEADER

**1. Visionary Leadership:** The principal, with the partnership of the school board, develops, articulates, implements and guards the vision of the school that is shared and supported by the school community.

**2. Instructional Leadership:** The principal, with the partnership of the administrative team, promotes the success of all students by planning, implementing and supervising a quality instructional program conducive to student learning.

**3. Inspirational Leadership:** The principal consistently inspires students, faculty and staff to be all they can be and achieve all they can achieve, increasing their confidence in their abilities.

### II. PRINCIPAL AS A MANAGER

**4. Managing Human Resources:** The principal builds a strong team by attracting, selecting, orienting, developing, evaluating and retaining faculty and staff who assist the school in accomplishing its purpose and mission.

**5. Managing Finances:** The principal understands and manages the finances of the school and understands the relationship between the goals of the school and the budgeting process. He/she uses resources effectively and conservatively, forecasts accurately and maintains budgetary projections consistently and controls operating costs by effectively utilizing staff and resources.

**6. Managing Facility:** The principal is aware that the school facilities reflect the school community. The principal administers the maintenance of the school and its environment, complementing the school vision, mission and goals.

**7. Managing Information:** The principal, with the administrators develops, distributes and revises school documents, weekly, monthly and annual publications and handbooks that are consistent with the school's vision.

### III. PRINCIPAL AS A COMMUNITY BUILDER

**8. Working with the Board:** The principal promotes and establishes an effective partnership with clearly defined responsibilities, a shared commitment to collaboration, open lines of communication, mutual respect and a common vision of the goals to be achieved.

**9. Working with Parents:** The principal promotes and establishes an effective partnership with parents. Communication is the foundation of a solid partnership. When parents and educators communicate effectively, positive relationships develop, problems are more easily solved, and students make greater progress.

**10. Working with Other Schools:** The principal represents the school in the educational community; he/she networks with other principals. The principal communicates with other principals to ensure that the school is in line with the principles of good practice of all school operations, especially those of admission, marketing, faculty recruitment and fundraising.

**11. Working with the Wider Community:** The principal maintains high visibility, active involvement, collaboration and communication with the larger community. S/he establishes partnership with area businesses and community groups to strengthen and support the school.

### IV. PRINCIPAL AS A CULTURE BUILDER

**12. Culture of Moral-Ethical Environment:** The principal ensures that every element of school life reflects the principles of equity, justice and dignity of each individual and models with integrity, fairness and justice.

**13. Culture of High Expectations:** The principal emphasizes quality performance and outstanding achievement and advocates, nurtures and sustains a school culture conducive to high achievement and student learning.

**14. Culture of Life-Long Learning and Developing People:** The principal encourages and models life-long learning; and creates development opportunities for the staff. The principal models that the greatness of a leader is not determined by the power they possess but the ability to empower others. Great leaders build their people to become better employees and leaders by actively engaging them in personal and professional growth.

**STAGE II: AFTER THE PRINCIPAL ANNOUNCES THAT HE/SHE DECIDED TO LEAVE: SEARCH PROCESS**

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### **1. Establish a Search Committee**

The first step in a professional principal search process is the formation of a strong search committee. This committee is the board's ad-hoc committee. Usually this committee consists of trustees as well as a few parents, community members and community leaders. This committee meets regularly; it is empowered by and reports to the board. The committee recommends candidates to the board, which will make the final decision and assign the principal. The committee works extensively and meets regularly until the principal is assigned to the job. The following steps outline the duties of the search committee.

### **2. Develop a Plan of Action**

The search committee brainstorms and develops a search process, interview strategies and a plan of action. They present this plan to the board for approval. The committee also decides on timelines, written documents, school information, announcements, and where to post the announcements.

### **3. Develop a Calendar with a Timeline**

Upon agreement about strategies and plans for the search process, the committee develops a calendar with a timeline. They will decide on important deadlines and objectives to keep the committee on track.

### **4. Prepare All the Written Documents for Principal Search**

The selection committee prepares all the written documents regarding the principal search, such as:

- Drafting the principal's job description
- Setting the standards expected from the principal
- Drafting a document indicating leadership skills expected from the principal
- Determining leadership style most appropriate for the school
- Preparing the job announcement. Drafting the principal's contract, compensation and benefit package

### **5. Prepare Job Announcements**

The search committee will draft an announcement for the principal search. After getting board approval, they will post the announcement in different Muslim educational magazines. The search committee should consider posting an announcement on the Internet. They should also consider encouraging qualified community educators to apply for the position. The search committee should request that candidates submit the following documents: Letter of interest, resume, references and educational philosophy.

### **6. Prepare School Information Package**

The committee prepares and sends a package to qualified candidates that inform them about the school. This package will consist of, school profile, school mission, vision and philosophy and the strategic plan.

### **7. Screen Initial Inquiries**

The search committee needs to decide who will screen the initial inquiries. It develops a system to rate the candidates. It prepares files for each candidate. If the majority of the search committee members agree that some of the candidates are not qualified for the position, the committee will inform those candidates by writing a rejection letter promptly. If necessary, the committee should arrange for a short phone interview with each candidate to screen applicants. Through this phase the committee will find a minimum of ten candidates for the next phase of the selection process.

### **8. Arrange for Interviews**

The committee invites the top ten candidates for an interview. Ideally, the committee should set aside one weekend for interviews. Each interview should dedicate one hour with the candidate and thirty minutes to privately discuss reactions from the committee members. After all the interviews are conducted, the committee meets to discuss all the candidates and selects two to three finalists.

### **9. Arrange Candidates Visit the School**

The search committee invites the final candidates to a one or two day visit of the school where they can meet the school community. The committee arranges a discussion group and dinner with search committee members, board members, some community members and masjid members. The committee requests feedback from each group.

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#### **10. Select the Top Candidate and Offer the Contract**

The search committee meets to determine their top choice and to make their final recommendations to the board. The board will discuss the search committee's recommendations and make the final decision. After the board makes their decision it will finalize the contract and make its job offer. After the contract is signed, arrangements are made to introduce the new principal to the community.

### **STAGE III: AFTER THE BOARD SELECTS THE NEW PRINCIPAL: SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION**

Hiring the principal does not complete the succession planning process, yet it is quite common for boards to breathe a collective sigh of relief and congratulate each other for the completion of a critical board task once the new principal is hired. Now begins another delicate stage of the succession planning process. This is the time that will require a skillful blend of board oversight and support without micromanagement, the principal's initiative in inviting and welcoming assistance, and hopefully, the staff's proactive role in helping the new principal learn about the school. There is still work to do to ensure that the new principal has a successful start. The board made a significant investment in finding a new principal. At the post-appointment stage the following strategies will help the new principal succeed during the first 12 months.

#### **Step 1: Announce the Appointment**

Good communication is an important ingredient of a successful transition. The school's constituencies, the staff, parents, community members and the major donors want to hear about the transition early and from the board directly. Allowing the key constituencies to find out about this major transition through the grapevine might seriously affect the school's important relationships. Planning the announcement involves targeting the school's constituencies, identifying the tools to reach those constituencies, and developing messages and materials. The board should decide who should receive phone calls, those who should receive a letter, and those who will read about the appointment in the newsletter. The basic materials might include the letter to constituencies, biography of the new principal and a press release. A letter written by the board chair announcing the new principal, explaining the transition plan with the letter written by the new principal is a good starting point.

#### **Step 2: Consider a Leadership Transition Team or a Principal Coach**

The board needs to establish a transition team composed of the members of the search committee and a few board members and staff. The primary goals of the transition team are:

- To support the school constituencies through a successful transition
- To create the conditions for a leadership transition to occur in a manner healthy for the school
- To provide a feedback mechanism to the transition team of inviting and receiving comments and suggestions on the effectiveness of the transition

The transition team will plan for regular meetings with the new principal and between the new principal and the board chair, and will also inform the board regularly on transition issues. The transition team will develop a communication plan to introduce the new principal to the school community.

#### **Step 3: Provide a Formal Orientation Program for the Principal**

Unless the new principal is familiar with the school in some capacity, he/she will have much to learn about new responsibilities, key players and a variety of strategic and tactical issues that demand immediate attention. It will be helpful to assign someone from the transition team, an individual board member or a staff member to take responsibility for sharing basic institutional information, addressing questions, and describing challenges. The transition team also plans for special welcoming events to formally introduce the new principal to key constituencies, provide orientation on the school and its culture and act as a transition guide as needed. The orientation process typically begins with a solid briefing for the new principal. During the briefing, the board goes over the organizational structure, systems, board, staff, community, financial and legal issues, strategic direction and priorities, programs, the culture of the school and immediate challenges. It is also helpful to provide the new principal with organizational guidelines, policies, contracts, agreements, staff and student files and an index of where to find a directory and other needed information.

#### **Step 4: Supporting the New Principal**

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#### **Step 4: Supporting the New Principal**

Supporting and retaining a good principal is the board's key responsibility. The post-hire process is about making the most of that investment, to retain a good principal and to help a good principal to become a great one. The board members should ask themselves the following questions:

- What can we do to help our new principal start on the right foot?
- What can we do to structure the board-principal relationship in a positive way?
- What can we do to make sure we achieve the priorities of this transition?

Once the new principal is on the job, the principal and the board have identified key challenges and priorities, it's time for the board to return to its traditional governance role. The time after the new principal is hired can be a difficult one for the board. For weeks and even months, the board has been more actively engaged than normal in the day to day work of the school, reviewing finances and operations and ensuring the organizations stability, however, now it is time to leave these roles to the new principal and continue with their governance roles and supporting the new principal by helping him/her to become successful through the following steps:

- Ensure that the new principal has essential information and materials about the school's finances, policies and more.
- Arrange for a welcome event to introduce the new principal to school constituencies.
- Arrange for introductions of the new principal at community forums, key donor events, and executive sessions with other nonprofit leaders, and other events.
- Offer training, coaching, or other professional development opportunities for the new principal, as needed.
- Develop a 90-day entry plan for the new principal identifying key short-term challenges and opportunities, along with orientation and learning priorities.
- Work with the new principal to develop a leadership agenda for the organization identifying short-term strategic priorities.
- Develop a plan with the new principal for monitoring and evaluating his/her performance.

#### **Step 5: Define the role of the outgoing principal in succession planning**

Ultimately, the principal's most important contribution to succession planning is to build organizational capacity that will leave the organization stronger and better for his/her successor. The outgoing principal will help with a smooth transition by doing the following:

- Be available at the board's request to share insights about the school's present condition and its future needs.
- Be willing to respond to final candidates who wish to speak with the last occupant of the office.
- Discourage individual staff, board members and others from coming to you to vent accumulated gripes about the search process or the new principal.
- If you are asked to play a role or execute a short-term assignment after your successor has been appointed, consult with the new principal for approval and guidance
- Be supportive of the new principal.
- Whenever in doubt about how to participate in the principal transition in a best way, put the school first by asking, "What role or response on my part would be in the best interest of the school?"

It is important for the board or the transition team to organize a going-away ceremony for the principal. This enables the school community, staff and parents to say a proper farewell and to think positively about the transition.