

## **School Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent Career Path Exploration**

Devon A. Lejman, Dr. Edward J. Lazaros

Ball State University

dalejman@bsu.edu; ejlazaros@bsu.edu

### **Introduction**

This article will outline information related to a career in education administration as a school superintendent. The purpose of this article is to help inform prospects of the intricacies of the career and allow them to make informed decisions about whether this career is right for them. This article will cover the following information related to a career as a school superintendent, in this order: responsibilities, how to become one, pay and benefits, job outlook, and an interview with someone currently in the position of assistant school superintendent.

### **Responsibilities of School Superintendents**

School superintendents are the chief executive officers (CEOs) of their respective districts, and act as administrators at the district level (Teacher.org). As such, superintendents oversee school administrators at lower levels, and are often tasked with hiring, placing, and evaluating principals within their district. Superintendents also make decisions related to budgets, such as choosing educational programs and staffing different facilities (Teacher.org).

While superintendents do not primarily work within school buildings, they do need to familiarize themselves with each school within their district, and often visit buildings in order to gain a sense of where changes need to be made related to faculty, budgeting, and allocation of other resources. Otherwise, superintendents generally spend much of their time working from a central office or meeting with board members and other administrators (Teacher.org).

### **How to Become a School Superintendent**

School superintendents are expected to have at least a master's degree or higher; this degree is typically in education administration or education leadership. Some states also require candidates to pass an exam and have a certain number of years of experience in school administration, as a principal or something similar (Teacher.org). Because of this, a superintendent will have had to complete teaching licensure requirements, including a bachelor's degree in an education field, a licensure exam, and any relevant background checks. They would likely also have taken additional classes related to leadership in order to have been hired as a principal (Teacher.org).

### **Pay and Benefits for Superintendents**

According to Salary.com, the average base salary earned annually by a school superintendent is \$159,352, and the range of actual earnings is between \$130,168 and \$192,275. This is at odds with other sources, such as the School Superintendents Association (AASA), which reports a mean salary of \$125,096 across all superintendents in the 2007-2008 school year; adjusted for inflation, this is slightly less than the lower limit provided by Salary.com. AASA also reports that the mean annual salary for assistant school superintendents was \$112,587 the same year; assistant superintendents typically earn less annually than superintendents do.

### **Job Outlook for School Superintendents**

Limited information is available in regards to job outlook specifically in regard to school superintendents; however, the United States Department of Labor predicts that the rate of growth for all education administrators will be eight percent from 2016 to 2026, which is approximately the same as the average across all occupations (2019). As in all education-related jobs, employment is expected to grow for administrators as student enrollment continues to increase as well.

According to Top Education Degrees, the demand for school superintendents will most likely be highest in public school districts, as opposed to private, charter or parochial schools. However, districts may face challenges related to growth as federal funding to education is cut or otherwise limited. This will affect assistant superintendents more so than superintendents, as this position is often contingent on available funding for additional personnel (Top Education Degrees).

### **Interview with Dr. David Sturgeon**

1. How did you come to be in your current position in Yorktown Community Schools?

*I am currently the Director of Education Initiatives (an assistant superintendent role). I was hired by Dr. Jennifer McCormick before she ran for election for her current elected position as our State of Indiana Superintendent of Schools. I served as an interim superintendent for 6 months as I was not interested in keeping it and asked to move back into my director's role. I have been with Yorktown Schools as a middle and elementary teacher, assistant middle school principal and athletic director, middle school principal and now my current central office role (D. Sturgeon, personal communication, June 10, 2019).*

2. What do you most enjoy about your job?

*I enjoy my job responsibilities and that I get to work with all levels of teachers and building principals—I get to say yes to most things and the "no's" are handled by the superintendent (D. Sturgeon, personal communication, June 10, 2019).*

3. What does a typical day at work look like for you?

*Much of my day consists of returning emails and/or in-person meeting with our technology integration specialist or technology coordinator, meeting with elementary principals, school district psychologist, etc. I also am in charge of all federal and state grants (applying for and implementing as well as working with my grant coordinator to follow). I am in charge of high ability for the district—mostly in the identification process (D. Sturgeon, personal communication, June 10, 2019).*

4. How do you use technology in a typical work day?

*Email, phone calls, MacBook and Apple software for developing online professional learning opportunities within Canvas (our learning management system), occasional WebEx meetings and trainings, several online portals for grant applications and tracking, and utilizing*

*educational websites for supports for teacher needs or principal needs (D. Sturgeon, personal communication, June 10, 2019).*

5. What is the biggest challenge you face on a daily basis?

*Getting timely responses from people outside of the district; I may need timely responses back to be able to move forward on pieces of some grants (D. Sturgeon, personal communication, June 10, 2019).*

6. What makes your position in Yorktown Community Schools unique?

*I wear many hats and that makes my position unique. Also, many people don't fully understand what goes into the grant process or curriculum making decisions for the district (D. Sturgeon, personal communication, June 10, 2019).*

7. What advice do you have for someone who wants to become a superintendent?

*Having served in that role for 6 months and knowing that I do not want that position I would say a person needs to be fully aware of the political dimension that the role of superintendent holds. They need to be politically savvy and able to work with and communicate effectively with their board members who are elected into those positions, community and business members, community groups such as the local Chamber of Commerce, etc. I would also recommend a future superintendent serve in a role of building principal for several years and in a central office business or assistant or director's role to have a better understanding as to the demands of the superintendency (D. Sturgeon, personal communication, June 10, 2019).*



*Dr. David Sturgeon sits in his office, where he works throughout the day when he isn't visiting schools or in meetings.*



*Dr. David Sturgeon's desk, including his desktop computer, where he's visiting the Yorktown Community Schools official website.*

## **Conclusion**

Chris Gaines, president of the School Superintendents Association (AASA), says that “we know now, perhaps more than ever, that all learning doesn’t have to look alike.” This, to him, is part of what school superintendents can help create: innovative ways to educate students, starting at the district level. School superintendents have a vast array of responsibilities as the district-level administrators of their respective schools. School administrators almost always need to have worked as classroom teachers and as principals prior to being hired as superintendents, so they must be experienced and dedicated to education at the classroom, school, and district levels. Someone fitting this description who pursues an education-related master’s degree or higher would be a good fit for a career as a district-level school administrator.

## **References**

D. Sturgeon, personal communication, June 10, 2019.

Salary.com. (n.d.) School Superintendent Salary in the United States. Retrieved June 6, 2019 from: <https://www1.salary.com/school-superintendent-salary.html>

School Superintendents Association. (n.d.) School Superintendent Salary Data. Retrieved June 7, 2019 from: <https://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=3030#>

Teacher.org. (n.d.) How to Become a Superintendent. Retrieved June 6, 2019 from: <https://www.teacher.org/career/superintendent/>

Top Education Degrees. (n.d.) Job Profile: School Superintendent. Retrieved June 7, 2019 from: <https://www.topeducationdegrees.org/job-profiles/school-superintendent/>

United States Department of Labor. (2019, April 26). Elementary, Middle, and High School Principals. Retrieved June 7, 2019, from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/elementary-middle-and-high-school-principals.htm#tab-1>