



A Great Education for All Students Depends on Great Leadership

The Importance of Hiring and Managing an Effective Director of Schools

The Vital Role of a Director of Schools

School districts depend on a competent and effective Director of Schools to create a vision for the school system, develop a culture of unity, support and high expectations among faculty and staff, recruit and lead the needed operational and instructional teams, and manage and administer a comprehensive school budget. The Director of Schools must advocate for the school system and build confidence and support among stakeholders, all while identifying pathways and strategies that will produce greater academic outcomes for students and families.

Without a doubt, this is an essential role that can make or break the school district, yet in recent years, it's been an ongoing challenge for Nashville's Metropolitan Board of Public Education to identify and retain an effective Director of Schools to oversee the 86,000-student district.

The Struggle to Retain a Quality Director of Schools

Since 2015, MNPS has cycled through three Directors of Schools and two interim Directors as the district has struggled with lagging student outcomes, allegations of mishandled contracts and teacher misconduct complaints, equity gaps and pay disparities, and in-fighting among school board members and MNPS leadership.

The lack of consistent leadership has sparked increased public scrutiny and exacerbated fiscal concerns while also affecting the district's overarching ability to support academic progress in schools. Even MNPS school board members themselves [acknowledge](#) that the district is now trying to emerge from "some of the lowest culture in 30 years" and "it's going to take years to rebuild the culture and trust for our teachers."

What Does an Effective Director of Schools Look Like?

An effective Director of Schools must be prepared to:

- Serve as CEO of the school district, **developing a vision** for the district, **establishing concrete academic performance goals**, and creating strategies for attainment;
- Understand and promote best practices to **support higher academic performance**, **improve the quality of instruction**, foster a collaborative culture, and provide **meaningful training opportunities** for teachers;

- **Collaborate productively** with the School Board and school leadership, serving as a sounding board and resource to support shared goals, **identify and address challenges**, and capitalize on new opportunities that will benefit students and families; and
- Manage a budget and **establish fiscal priorities** that will support the overarching goals and vision for the district.

Above all, a truly great Director of Schools must serve as a model of inspired leadership for the district and maintain a constant focus on advancing policies that put the needs of students *first*.

Our Students and Families Deserve Strong Leadership

The school board and Director of Schools must work hand-in-hand to establish and realize a strong vision for the school district. The two must be partners in developing strategies to improve classroom experiences, recruit and retain effective teachers, build community support, and – most importantly – generate greater academic gains and results for *all* students.

At NashvilleNOW, we believe it is of utmost importance to “have a functional School Board in sync with its Director of Schools and our Mayor, together offering a clear vision, a plan, and leadership fully focused on improving academic outcomes for ALL students.”

That’s why we’re taking a closer look at the challenges facing the MNPS Board and releasing a series of issue briefs that highlight opportunities to build an even stronger board for the future. See last week’s edition on [“Assessing the Roles and Responsibilities of the MNPS School Board”](#)