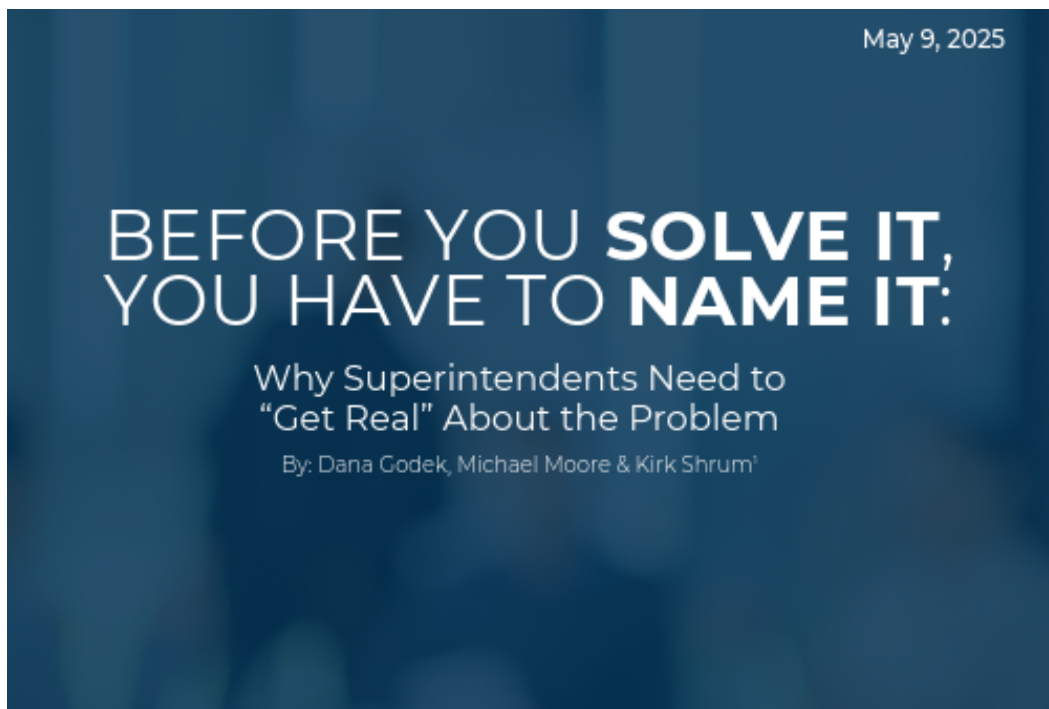


ADMIN & MANAGEMENT

DALI Research: Before you solve it, you have to name it

By DA Staff August 27, 2025



Buying a standing desk before counting your daily steps won't make you healthier, it just makes you look like you're working on it, says the latest DA research.

The same is true for school systems, say the authors of "Before You Solve It, You Have to Name It," a new research report from the [DA Leadership Institute](#).

Every year around this time, superintendents across the country feel the pressure to solve something: test scores are coming in, budget timelines are tight and the political winds are shifting. But if you haven't clarified the actual problem, no solution—no matter how polished—will move your system forward.

The superintendent's job has always been hard, but it has never been this public, politicized or personal. Today's superintendents must navigate a drastically changed landscape—marked by increased political polarization, community skepticism, and national scrutiny over local school decisions.

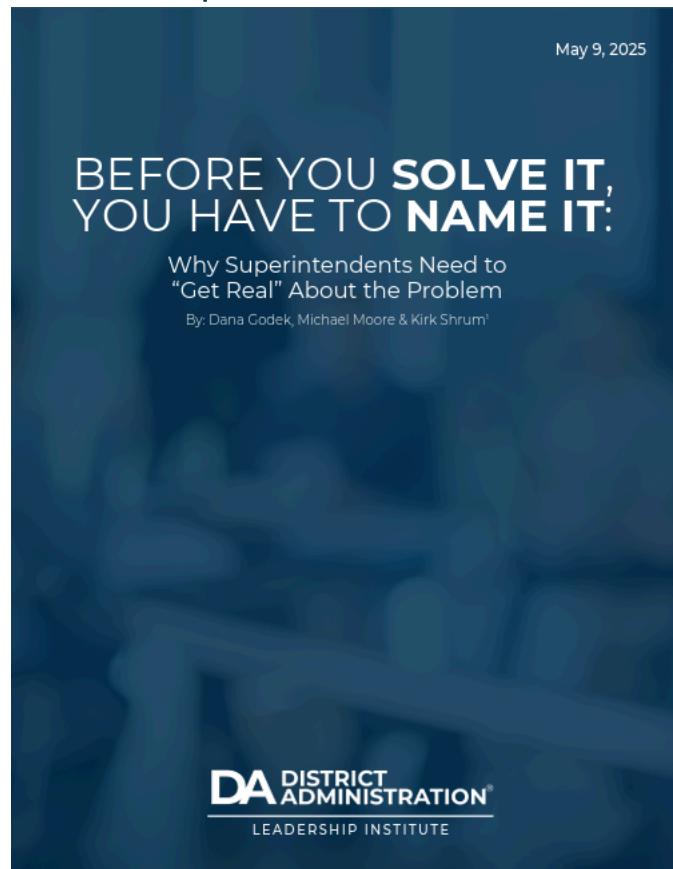
The role of the superintendent has changed profoundly over the past decade. Particularly since the 2016 election, superintendents have been pulled into national-level disputes over curriculum, diversity, social-emotional learning, public health, and school choice, issues that now dominate local board meetings and social media feeds.



This paper advocates for deep problem diagnosis as a method to equip superintendents, senior leaders, and boards with practical tools and processes to confront today's realities. We argue that superintendents will spend increasing amounts of time looking and engaging outward. Only then will they be ready to turn inward to activate the tools that turn the knowledge they've gained into actionable strategies.

This executive leadership will require both windows (outward) and mirrors (inward). By understanding and applying these tools, superintendents can lead their districts with resilience, legitimacy, and political capital.

You can read the full research report below:



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