

ADMIN &amp; MANAGEMENT

# Strategic reorganization: How to consolidate cabinet roles

By Dr. Dana Godek and Michael Moore | April 22, 2025



School districts are feeling the pinch. Budgets are shrinking, costs are rising and leaders are under pressure to do more with less. For some districts, rethinking leadership roles may be part of the solution.

By consolidating roles—a strategy that’s gaining traction in the corporate world—districts can improve efficiency, break down silos, and develop stronger leaders.

Think of it like a Swiss Army knife. Instead of carrying around a toolbox filled with separate tools for every job, the Swiss Army knife offers a practical, streamlined solution—multiple tools in one.

Done right, consolidating roles in district leadership can have the same effect: fewer positions but still equipped to handle the complexity of school system operations.

In the corporate world, some companies have merged their chief financial officer and chief operating officer roles to align budget decisions with operational needs. Others have combined marketing, sales and customer service under one chief experience officer to improve customer engagement. While schools aren’t businesses, they face similarly complex challenges that demand efficient leadership.



Some districts have already embraced this strategy. Austin Independent School District in Texas merged its chief schools officer and chief academic officer roles, creating a streamlined position focused on both school operations and academic achievement. This change improved communication between principals and academic teams, accelerating data-informed instructional shifts.

In Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky, the district combined its finance and operations departments under one leader, improving coordination between budget planning and school facilities projects.

Fulton County Schools in Georgia restructured its leadership to merge federal programs oversight with curriculum support services, ensuring grant-funded initiatives aligned more effectively with district-wide instructional goals.

## When one tool tries to do too much

Consolidating leadership roles offers several potential benefits. First, it can improve decision-making by shrinking the number of direct reports to the superintendent, allowing top leaders to focus on major district priorities.

Second, it can reduce costs, freeing up funds for student services or teacher support. Third, combining roles gives leaders broader experience, strengthening the district's leadership pipeline and preparing future superintendents.

Finally, a smaller leadership team can improve accountability by making it clearer who owns specific initiatives.

Of course, there are risks. Expanding one leader's responsibilities can lead to burnout, especially if they don't have enough support staff. Consolidation may also reduce specialized expertise, particularly in areas like special education or compliance.

And if changes are made too quickly or without clear communication, workflows can become disrupted. Even the best Swiss Army knife has limits—when one tool tries to do too much, it risks losing precision.

The key to successful reorganization lies in strategic planning. Districts should identify roles with natural overlap, such as merging student services with special education or combining finance and operations.

Piloting role combinations on an interim basis can reveal potential challenges before committing to long-term changes. District leaders should also invest in professional development to help newly expanded roles succeed.

Here is a simple checklist to help guide your thinking if you're considering consolidating roles:

### Step 1: Assess district needs and priorities

- Identify key budget constraints and financial pressures.
- Review district priorities—such as student achievement, equity or operational efficiency—to ensure role changes align with strategic goals.



- Map current leadership roles and responsibilities to identify redundancies or gaps.
- Engage key stakeholders (e.g., school board, principals, cabinet leaders) to gather input on areas where consolidation could improve outcomes.

## Step 2: Identify logical role combinations

- Look for roles with overlapping responsibilities (e.g., CFO/COO or CAO/Innovation Officer).
- Ensure that combined roles maintain focus on critical areas like special education, compliance or student services.
- Consider pilot assignments to test potential combinations before committing to permanent changes.

## Step 3: Develop a transition plan

- Outline clear timelines for role consolidation and leadership shifts.
- Assign interim leaders if needed to ensure continuity during transitions.
- Identify staff to provide additional support for leaders taking on expanded roles.
- Communicate changes clearly to staff, families and community stakeholders to avoid confusion.

## Step 4: Provide leadership support and development

- Offer professional development to help leaders manage expanded responsibilities.
- Establish mentoring or coaching opportunities for leaders in newly consolidated roles.
- Identify tools or systems (e.g., project management platforms) to help manage larger workloads.

## Step 5: Monitor and evaluate

- Establish clear performance indicators to track the impact of consolidated roles.
- Conduct regular check-ins with leaders to assess workload and identify areas requiring additional support.
- Solicit feedback from staff and stakeholders to ensure the new structure is meeting district needs.
- Adjust leadership structures as needed based on ongoing evaluation.

Budget pressures may be forcing school districts to rethink how they operate but consolidation doesn't have to mean cutting corners. With thoughtful planning and the right people in place, districts can build leadership teams that are lean, effective and ready to meet the challenges ahead.

Just like a well-designed Swiss Army knife, the right combination of skills and roles can create a powerful tool for delivering better outcomes for students.

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