

ADMIN & MANAGEMENT | LEADERSHIP

Time horizons: How leaders turn the clock to strategy

By Dr. Dana Godek and Michael Moore March 28, 2024



We have a colleague who wrote a dissertation on how schools manage problems by relying on time. Don't like that student in your class? They'll have a different teacher next year. New teacher not working out? The contract notification deadline is coming up.

Time also creates problems—class periods and academic years are fixed, and everyone takes vacation at the same time—to name a few.

We're the only industry to be so focused on time. Perhaps this is because school schedules were based on the factory models of old. There are short cycles such as when the bell rings for the next period and how long the PLC meeting can run. And there are longer cycles such as legislative approval of school funding and the length of collective bargaining agreements.

The higher your role in the hierarchy, the longer your time horizon. Your role has a unique time horizon: no other role has those responsibilities. A teacher's time horizon is focused on the next lesson or activity. A principal is focused on the upcoming PLC meetings, what needs to be done prior to spring break or teacher vacancies to fill.

A chief's time horizon is longer: planning for next year, ensuring that funds are allocated, building tools for school-level people to use. And a superintendent's time horizon is longest of all: budgeting, capital projects, strategic initiatives and changing state requirements.



This is the time to prioritize those issues that are only on your time horizon and to ensure that the various roles in your district are paying attention to their own time horizons.

Put Father Time on the treadmill

A time horizon perspective strengthens communication, collaboration and cooperation throughout the organization. Principals can reflect on the results of their [school improvement plans](#), share promising practices and inform the work of the district's teams.

Operational leads can conduct a SWOT analysis of their functions to address challenges and build on strengths. Chiefs can provide year-end summaries to the cabinet and the board that become the springboard for next year's planning.

What issues should be on a Superintendent's time horizon before taking a much needed summer break?

How superintendents can turn the clock into a strategy

1. Release of state accountability scores. Most states release at least some performance information early in the summer. Do stakeholders understand the state's calendar, formulas and messaging? How will those results be shared with and used by principals and their supervisors?

Are board members prepared to understand the reports and answer constituents' questions? If you are expecting particularly positive or negative results, what is your communication plan—and your action plan?

2. Strategic initiatives. We have seen a sharp increase in formal strategic planning in districts of all sizes. Board and community members appreciate an annual report on initiative milestones, project accomplishments, and student results. Leaders of each initiative or goal can use the end of the year to capture their work and confirm next year's progress measures.

3. Enrollment and fiscal trends. Student enrollment, the key driver of state funding, is dipping in most districts while ESSER and other pandemic funding is ending. We hope that the FY25 budgeting process reflects those shifts. Now it's time to launch an ongoing district-wide recruiting initiative to attract families and students—and their funding—back to district schools.

Unless you had a significant dip in the general population, the students you lost are still there but in home-schooling, micro-schools, charters or private schools. Focus on finding them, learning about their needs, marketing to them and re-enrolling them. Consider hosting a roundtable discussion with these families and then act upon what they suggest.

4. Staffing. It is not too soon to think about creative staffing solutions for hard-to-fill positions or hard-to-staff schools. How might you use virtual instruction? Hybrid instruction?

How might you use a master teacher model that puts the most effective teachers in front of more students? What is the trigger for reducing the high school program of study? For



increasing class size? Is it time to reduce the number of coaching positions and place those teachers back in classrooms?

The added benefit is to have them teach and run more powerful PLCs based on their shared experiences with target schools. Districts can create models now of coherent and equitable systems that address these situations by organizing staffing deployment tiers.

5. Operational excellence. Every year, we read about districts that failed to complete renovation projects on time, switched to new bus routing software that took months to run on time or ordered new curricula materials too late for summer professional development. Superintendents often feel ill-prepared to oversee large-scale operational functions, yet these are the issues that land in the news or get dozens of parents to board meetings.

It's important to ensure that solid project management processes are in place, that the superintendent understands the critical path, that critical systems such as bus routing are live-tested, and that contingency plans are in place before problems arise. Clear project management oversight and accountability should be in place. Without it, you become the project manager, creating a part-time vacancy in the superintendent suite.

6. Governance reset. With the five topics above on your time horizon, it is time to celebrate the good work of the current year and begin focusing on the highest priorities for next year. Do not be shy about celebrating good work and progress with your board. Connect those successes to next year's work. Identify ways to connect the work of the cabinet more tightly with the Board's goals and processes.

Adopting a CEO-like perspective on time horizons will positively impact your district's future—turning school-daze into summer strategy.

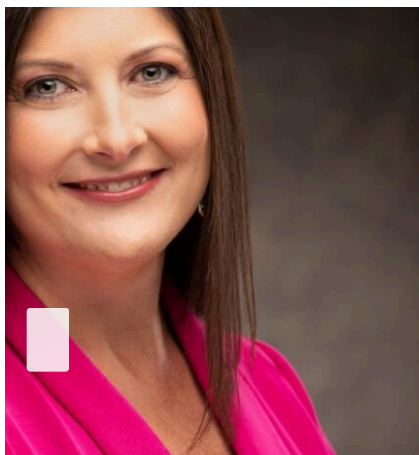
← PREVIOUS

ICYMI: DA's latest Leadership Institute is all about self-care and branding

NEXT →

How this nationally recognized superintendent is 'building champions' by opening doors

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE



Superintendent incorporated
turning that produces results

Superintendent steps down from a big
district as turnover keeps churning

This is what :
turnout like in one of



**District Administration
Leadership Institute**

is a Premier K-12

Membership

organization with a vibrant community of **educational leaders** committed to driving change in education and enhancing the lives of students across the nation.

LINKS

LEARN ABOUT
MEMBERSHIP

PARTNER WITH US

ATTEND A DALI EVENT

DISTRICT
ADMINISTRATION



222 Lakeview Ave Suite 800 West Palm Beach FL

© 2025 DA Leadership Institute *Part of the Arc Network*

