



Site visits

Superintendent selection processes often culminate with an official visit to the finalist's district by some or all of the board members. Their purpose is to confirm their decision by learning more about the candidate and confirming his or her qualifications and achievements. They usually see it as a way to show the public they've made a concerted effort to identify the best person for the job, particularly if it's been a closed search.

Although site visits are a common practice, they are not a given. Some boards question the authenticity of a tour orchestrated by the subject of the review, and instead opt to focus on thorough reference checks. Others feel it's not a justifiable expense.

In the event you reach a point in the selection process when you are asked to arrange a site visit, you should carefully consider the answers to these questions before you agree.

Does the board plan to visit the districts of any other candidates?

Although it would be difficult, it's generally agreed that you should politely decline because it is not in your best interest. If the job is offered to another candidate after a high profile visit to your district it could substantially damage your credibility in your current position. Your better option is to suggest that you would gladly schedule a visit if the board decides you are its choice. It's very important that you do your best to avoid seeming arrogant or offended; instead, strive to show your appreciation for the invitation while emphasizing your concern for your current district.

Has the board offered you the position?

A site visit before a formal job offer or even a verbal commitment implies a similar risk. You may be the only candidate under consideration, but the lack of an offer could be a sign of uncertainty and the possibility that the board might decide to continue the search. Rejecting your candidacy after a site visit would involve a risk similar to multiple site visits.

How will a site visit affect my district?

A site visit is likely to be a high-profile event in your community. It will not only not only be a complete loss of confidentiality; it will serve to emphasize your intent to leave and cause your stakeholders to feel you are no longer committed to their district. Planning and preparation will involve

district staff time and effort, and your visitors are likely to want to speak with board members, staff, and parents and possibly even community members and students. You can expect it to cause anxiety and uncertainty about who will follow in your position. Assuming you are successful and well-liked, there will even be some who take exception to playing a role in promoting your departure.

What is involved in a site visit?

In a typical site visit, the candidate is responsible for making arrangements that are primarily based on the board's expectations. Usually he or she collaborates with the board president, the board's designee, or sometimes the search consultant to identify agenda items and then assumes responsibility for inviting participants and scheduling times, meeting locations, and tours.

Your visitors should bear responsibility for their travel expenses, but you, not your district, should be responsible for any other expenditures.

The visiting team may include stakeholder representatives as well as members of the board. Usually they will want to meet with your superintendent (if this will be your first position), your board members, administrators, union leaders, teachers, other staff, parents, community members, and students.

This will be your first opportunity to display your competency and leadership skills in action, so careful preparation is essential. Every aspect should focus on showcasing you and every agenda item should unfold smoothly and as planned. Refreshments should be readily available. Each member of the visiting team should be presented with an agenda and an itinerary that reflects professionalism. If possible, be sure to incorporate a time to introduce your spouse, partner, and children.

What is the worst case scenario?

In nearly all cases, board members and their entourage consider the decision made and see the visit as an opportunity to confirm the choice. They will be looking for affirmations and asking questions focused on reaffirming what they already know. The board members will be relieved the process is nearly complete, and the last thing on their minds is reopening the search.

Unfortunately, however, there is still a remote possibility that something will happen to make them reconsider. They could discover some new information that was overlooked during reference checks and internet searches or learn something so important it establishes reasonable doubt about the fit.

In the unlikely event you are suddenly presented with an about-face, it is crucial that you maintain your poise and exhibit complete professionalism. Accept the decision with grace and dignity, thank the board for their interest, and resolve to direct all of your energy and passion toward doing your current job to the best of your ability and to continue your search. It is sure to impress everyone involved, including the search consultants.