

## Chapter 2

# Danish Superintendents as Players in Multiple Networks

Lejf Moos, Klaus Kasper Kofod, and Ulf Brinkkjær

**Abstract** The Danish educational sector is increasingly being drawn into the general public governance, in line with other municipal sectors. Thus it has been influenced by transnational thinking, by hard and soft governance approaches and by social technologies with international inspiration and origins. Municipal governance and administration is being restructured to fit new concepts. As a consequence, schools superintendents' position and relations are changing as the system moves from welfare-state thinking towards competitive-state thinking. The results of our surveys to schools superintendents, school board members and school leaders illustrate aspects of the new situation confronting superintendents located at the midpoint of governance chains and networks. The division of labour between political and administrative responsibilities is at the forefront of the images of emerging and changing networks of political, administrative and educational practitioners.

**Keywords** Networks • Chain • Public governance • Restructurings • Position • Function

## 1 Transnational and National Developments and Trends

This section focuses on national and international trends in Danish education. It will become apparent, first, that a significant proportion of national trends in the Danish educational field have been generated or inspired by *international* trends. It will also become clear that an important share of these changes and reforms can be characterised as moving towards the logic of a commercial market, in the sense that economic rationale increasingly penetrates all forms of pedagogical reflection and governance. In Denmark, as in the other Nordic countries, schools and education

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L. Moos (✉)

Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen, Denmark

e-mail: [moos@dpu.dk](mailto:moos@dpu.dk)

K.K. Kofod • U. Brinkkjær

Department of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen, Denmark

e-mail: [kako@edu.au.dk](mailto:kako@edu.au.dk); [ulf@dpu.dk](mailto:ulf@dpu.dk)

are paid for by taxes and the institutions are free to use their income as needed. It is not meaningful to talk about the educational system as a market. It is, however, evident in what local and national politicians say when they discuss the reform of education that a growing share of their arguments are based in what Weber would have labelled economic/objective rationality.

It makes sense to look back in recent social and political history, because even if past visions and policies have been superseded, they rarely disappear completely. Former policies still form an important basis for understanding recent thinking and practice. We can, with Pedersen (2011), trace a general social and economic development from a postwar welfare state to a more recent competitive state.

The welfare state was founded in equality and participatory democracy; the contemporary competition state is based on competition and readiness for the labour market. The Nordic welfare state emerged in the eighteenth century, growing from the self-help cooperative movement. Against this background, the state was considered the protector of citizens from surrounding threats and the safeguard of participatory democracy at both national and local level. Democracy was less hierarchical than it is today. In a context of prosperity and full employment, the distance between the top and bottom of society was small, and considerable influence was evident on the local level.

One of the central values of this period was to make school contribute to the development both of democracy and of democratic individuals. Thus the political centre-left endeavoured to develop a non-tiered school system in which social equality and democracy were core values. 'Social equality through education' was a central slogan of the era.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the economic context changed. Global interdependence became increasingly apparent. From something previously unknown, the international environment began to be a part of the educational system. Transnational agents emerged and grew in importance. Organisations and structures such as the World Trade Organisation, the OECD (the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), the International Monetary Fund and the European Union acquired increased importance. Countries were inspired to enter into and accept a new situation: a global market with free movement of finances, goods and labour.

From the late 1970s, Danish governments began to adjust their economic policies. Then adjustments of additional types of policies followed. These initiatives were triggered by economic recession and unemployment. Danish participation in the neoliberal global market was seen as a new route to prosperity. Among the effects was increased pressure on the public sector as the place where costs could be saved and work could be performed with greater efficiency and competitiveness. Various forms of New Public Management were established in order to prepare the public sector for participation in this competition, and to teach people to see themselves as a labour force, rather than as citizens or families. The inspiration for New Public Management was taken from the private sector, specifically from the design of rules on competition, performance contracts, measurement and documentation of institution outputs, users' 'freedom of choice,' and outsourcing. Recurring themes were decentralisation and market thinking. During this period, the dominant politi-

cal discourse on the core values of schools was transformed. Education for work and competition were emphasised as new core values. There were moves to dismantle one-for-all comprehensive schools.

During the same time period, relations between the state, the municipalities and the institutions also changed, in ways reminiscent of bureaucratic group hierarchies and of 'Principal-Agent' control. Politicians began to be seen as the school leaders who would take decisions, while civil servants began to be seen as agents executing the policies (Pedersen 2011). These structures were meant to secure Denmark's survival and success in the face of global competition. Local authorities and institutions increasingly came under the control of economic frameworks and national policy targets.

A series of social technologies was applied – including contracts, bench-mark quality reports, auditing, certifications and accreditations, privatisations, outsourcing, evaluations and documentations. To connect country objectives with intentions, a complicated web of negotiations between municipal and state levels was constructed. Taken together, these policies and initiatives represent a de-democratisation at the local level, and a concentration of political and economic power at the state level (Pedersen 2011, p. 225).

During these years, public schools were confronted with an array of changes. Some of these were the consequence of tense economic circumstances. One way to save or streamline operations was to dismantle small, unprofitable and technically insufficient units and merge them into larger ones. Between 2008 and 2011, as many as 400 of Denmark's 1317 schools were affected by such restructuring (Stanek 2011). Thus managing a school has developed from heading a school at one specific location to heading a complex entity of several institutions located at several different premises (cluster management). Simultaneously, changes in the culture within local administration have taken place (Moos 2011). We are witnessing a tendency towards an increase in hierarchies of single-stringed or unified management, accompanied by a growing distance between schools on the one hand and political and administrative management on the other. We also see that a part of this process has now entered into legislation, as was illustrated when the Danish school was relabelled in 2006 from a welfare school to a school for the competitive state.

The allegedly poor Danish results in international comparisons of test results (e.g. TIMS, PIRLS and PISA) have been interpreted as evidence of the deficiencies in the Danish school – as evidence that the knowledge and abilities produced in Danish schools are not satisfactory. The comparison of test results has become an easily communicated symbol for setting objectives. That was illustrated when the Danish government of 2007–2011 generated a slogan stating that Denmark should be among the top five PISA performers (without mentioning that none of the top five countries at the time were democracies). The comparisons also illustrate that the purpose of schooling has been transformed into a question of testable subject knowledge. Further illustrations of this were the national test of 2006 and student study plans.

Many of these changes followed local reaction to political discourses channelled by the 2001–2007 government's willingness to grant exceptions from the existing

law (Kamil and Strand 2011). The comprehensive school-for-all is gradually disintegrating under the onslaught of granted exceptions on the composition of classes and groups and grouping by ability. Some schools have been characterised as profile or talent-grade schools, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of gifted pupils. The same trend is seen in the increasing number of private schools: 14 % of Danish children were admitted to private schools in 2010, compared with 6 % in 1970. These figures do to some extent reflect parents' dissatisfaction with public schools: in 1990 60 % were 'Very satisfied,' while by 2007 this figure had decreased to 29 % (Gallup in: Kamil and Strand 2011, p. 25)

The degree of satisfaction with public schools has become a relevant indicator of support, firstly because it is possible for parents to move their children to private school, and secondly because the 2001–2007 government introduced 'free choice of school,' allowing parents almost unlimited power to choose their children's school across district boundaries and even in another municipality. The consequential increase in competition between schools has, among other changes, led some schools to move in a specific vocational or educational direction.

## 1.1 Conclusions

In parallel with schools developing profiles which may differ considerably from one another, a tendency for decreased transparency and unclear general profiling has developed. A bunch of different political interests are pulling in opposite directions on the very important questions of which values should form the basis of the public school and on which values should be developed. The highly varied profiling of schools and parts of schools has contributed to this development. So have the frequent changes in school legislation (18 changes to the education acts within 10 years), which on the one hand have made it complicated for school leaders and professionals to establish an identity for the Danish school and, on the other, make it difficult for the various stakeholders to discover the identity of a specific school. The continuous changes in the societal framework, as well as in the public structures of schooling outlined above, can be summarised as follows.

### (a) *Numbers/indicators over political decisions*

The international PISA tests, combined with the increasing penetration of so-called objective or economic logic among politicians at international, national and regional levels as well as in commissions, think tanks and the media, have led to an increased emphasis on tests in the Danish school system. In accordance with this, the weight attributed to the results of such tests has increased, thereby further obscuring the fact that the standards discussion is a question of the *interpretation* of test results. The outcome is that politicians seemingly attribute increased meaning to technical matters, and less meaning to political issues. Political decisions thus appear to be based more on evidence and less on political considerations. In this sense, decisions in the area of school politics

can be described as emphasising quantitative indications and downplaying indications of *political* decisions.

(b) *From parliamentarianism to the market*

The increased weighting on and belief in tests has contributed to the view among politicians and public opinion that it is not only sensible but necessary that the Danish school and the politics of the Danish school should be driven increasingly by a rationality close to that of the market, rather than values and reflections on *Bildung* – the formation and distribution of educational wealth. Less obviously, such changes have also led to a kind of depoliticisation of educational governance. If questions about school content can be almost consistently answered by ‘what the market wants,’ then questions about necessary qualifications are no longer a question for political reflection for parliament and municipal councils, but a technical matter for labour-market experts.

(c) *Depoliticised school strategy for content and resources*

Particularly in the UK and the US, these developments have led to massive investments in measurements of quantifiable indicators of the type we see in ‘school effectiveness’ initiatives – something that was rare a generation ago. These initiatives do not change the fact that the politics of the Danish school has been for generations and still is developed and handled by politicians and by municipal administrations. Things have changed, however, with respect to two issues. Firstly, the changes entail a depoliticisation of school strategies, as we saw in (b) above. This means that when ‘the market’ (mediated by parliament and local administration) gives a greater part of the answer, then social and political values are giving a smaller part. This entails that issues of content and *pedagogik* or the theory of teaching will be treated as a technical rather than political matter. Secondly, with these developments a fair share of the pedagogical reflections and decisions on content and form are removed from schools and teachers, because national tests and standards entail answers on these issues. We are thus moving in the direction of seeing school as more of a technical matter than a didactic and pedagogical matter.

(d) *Changing the purpose of school and social technologies.*

One tendency in the changes discussed could be described as a sort of ‘leaning’ on school content, in the sense that it entails a trend towards those parts of the content that mean most in a market logic – that is, in qualifying the workforce. Other aspects of school, which qualify children for general navigation in society, for empowerment as a citizen and so on, are downplayed.

## 2 Municipalities, Their Composition, Positions and Relations to State Level

Denmark has 5.6 million inhabitants (Statistik 2013), with a high employment rate for both men (72.5 %) and women (69.5 %) (Beskæftigelsesministeriet 2012, pp. 13–15). Danish society was traditionally very homogeneous, characterised by

*democracy* and *equality* (a small power distance), and *inclusive* towards other cultures (a small uncertainty avoidance) (Hofstede 1980). Over the past decade, this image of a deeply rooted, unambiguous and homogeneous culture may have changed as Denmark experienced an influx of people whose mother tongue was not Danish.

The modern Danish municipal system dates back to 1841 with the introduction of municipal self-government (Johansen 1991, pp. 39–40). In 1970, as a result of municipal reform, the 1386 municipalities were reduced to 275 (Pedersen 1991, p. 33), and in 2007 these were again reduced to 98 through further mergers (Christiansen and Klitgaard 2008). Thus most municipalities are now bigger than before. With at least 20,000 inhabitants as a rule of thumb, they have acquired more tasks, are expected to play a more proactive role in a range of issues, and the role of the municipal democracy has changed (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012, p. 54), with more power concentrated around the elected mayor and the employed city manager at the expense of the politically composed elected municipal council (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). As municipalities have been merged into bigger units, many schools have been shut down or merged into departmental schools. In 2011 there were 1317 *folkeskoler* (as compared to 1708 in 1996, a decrease of 391 or 23 %).

The municipalities' self-governance is regulated through the Law on the Steering of the Municipalities (2013). Here it is specified that the municipal council, which has overall responsibility for municipal activities, governs the municipality's affairs. The council elects its own chairman, that is, the mayor. The immediate administration of the municipalities' tasks is governed by committees, whereas the mayor is in charge of the supreme daily management of the municipal administration (Lov om kommuners styrelse 2013).

A municipality is required to run their operation based on objectives and frameworks established by parliament and government. There is discretion in determining how the operation is to be organised in order to achieve the objectives. For example, what resources are to be used, how they are to be organised, how the premises are to be designed and, to some extent, what staff are to be employed. Regardless of how a municipality decides to organise their work, they must guarantee all children and students an equivalent education (Lov om kommuners styrelse 2013).

The municipalities are typically governed through standing committees, one of which the committee that has schools as its field of responsibility.<sup>1</sup> In these committees, the politicians have ultimate overall political responsibility for the operations of the schools. With the new, bigger municipalities since the 2007 municipal reform, the balance between the politicians and the civil servants has changed, so that the politicians' responsibility has become more of an overall political responsibility as opposed to a more hands-on political responsibility whereas direct responsibility for daily operations is taken care of by the superintendent (Christoffersen and Klausen

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<sup>1</sup>The name and the area of responsibility change from municipality to municipality, but there is always a committee that has schools as its responsibility.

2012, p. 58).<sup>2</sup> The law states that the concrete rules for the management of the municipality are determined in a steering ordinance passed by the municipal council (Lov om kommuners styrelse 2013, § 2,2). Therefore there are differences among municipalities on how the municipality is managed. As a consequence there are different steering mixes between municipalities, and even within single municipalities, between the various parts of the administration and the various sectors (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012, p. 67).

These ways of managing the public sector are in line with the neoliberal economic and steering rationales called New Public Management (Hood 1991) which, since the 1980s, have been dominant in the OECD, the European Union and the Danish public sector. Fundamental to this very broad and diverse tendency are the notions of marketplace and management: the idea that the public sector is best governed by ideas originating in steering techniques used in the private sector in the form of competition, consumer choice and transparent institutions. One sign of this tendency is the free school choice, both across school and daycare institution's catchment areas, and across municipal boundaries.

Following this tendency, a number of relatively new tools and social technologies for accountability were introduced. Parallel to the reforms from the ministry of education, a number of reforms were in evidence from the ministry of finance and the ministry of the interior – the restructuring of the public sectors. This latter wave of reform has influenced the political board and the superintendent level even more than the educational reforms.

There have been many changes in the school sector. During the 9-year period from 2001 to 2010, the Folkeskole Act was amended 18 times. The most important change was the 2006 shift in the Aims clause, which was modified from an emphasis on preparing pupils for participating in a democracy to one on making students employable in a competitive economy in a competitive state. These changes are in line with the transformation of Danish society from the traditional welfare society with a focus on citizens' rights to a competitive state with a focus on citizens as human capital in the global competition as a consequence of globalisation (Bauman 1999; Pedersen 2011).

The regulation of the Danish school system has changed in several important ways during the last two decades. At the beginning of the 1980s there was a strong general move to decentralise finances, personnel management and other areas from state level to the local municipal level, and in many cases from there to the school level. These changes were introduced at a time when the Danish economy was in some difficulty because expenses in the public sector had run out of control and because the exchange ratio between Denmark and its trading partners and competitors had deteriorated. At the end of the 1990s a re-centralisation of the goal-setting and evaluation of schools' work was also observed (Tanggaard 2011) in order that

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<sup>2</sup>When talking about how the municipalities are governed, it is important to stress that there is no single picture of how the municipalities are organised; there are variations among the municipalities because there is room for discretion in the law, so the description is an ideal type description.

the central authorities should regain control over and enhance the quality of the public sector output.

In order to remedy the calamities in the public sector, it was decided in the Danish parliament to focus on the public sector being ‘close to the citizen’ and that the greatest possible number of decisions should be taken at the local level, that citizens should have a say on what goods and how they should be provided with by the public sector, that public institutions should be transparent, and that they should compete with one another. In short, the public sector should be both efficient and effective (Finansministeriet 1983; Greve 2001; Klausen 1996; Pedersen 2011).

A few examples serve to illustrate this. The increased influence for parents at the school level by organising school boards, as well as parents’ free choice of schools, management by objectives, and the goal- and result-oriented system, emphasised professional ability and responsibility on several different levels in the steering system, especially for teachers and school leaders. It was argued that if the state decentralised tasks to schools, local educational administration staff could be cut down (Torfing 2004).

### 3 Structures Within Municipalities and Its Effect

The 30 years in which New Public Management has been a dominant steering technology and ideology have witnessed the decentralisation of more tasks and responsibilities in Denmark from the state to the municipalities and to schools. The municipalities have become more responsible for providing educational services on the one hand, and on the other hand they have acquired more freedom regarding the organisation of those services. In order not to completely lose control, legislators and municipal politicians therefore perceived the need to strengthen the organisational couplings between the various administrative layers of the school system. New and different social steering technologies were developed in order to control a system now characterised by simultaneously being both strongly and loosely coupled. Among these technologies can be mentioned the use of assessment data, the monitoring and publication of student results, and accounting reports that represent new ways of coordinating and monitoring the school system. That establishes new ways of interaction between state, local authorities, and schools. These developments have resulted in decreased local autonomy and increased bureaucratisation on the one hand, and enhanced local autonomy among municipalities and schools through the decentralisation on the other (Paulsen et al. 2014). This has meant decentralisation and centralisation at one and the same time –centralisation inside the decentralisation.

When the educational system is either centralised or decentralised, the balance between professional and political power at all levels in the system is changed. The responsibility and professional ability of school leaders and teachers are enhanced, at the same time as evaluation becomes an important instrument for governing and ‘... *In using more control and in seeing the educational system as being in a global*



*competition, the politics of education will be more and more reactive in its scope...*' (Official Journal C 318 2008/C 319). During a period which has strongly featured re-centralisation of the content of schools (curricula and accountability), the schools find themselves in charge of finances, human resource and day-to-day management, and at the same time the municipalities have become an important factor in the ministry's 'quality assurance system.'

The Danish school system, alone among the Nordic countries, has two school boards. One is the political committee representing the municipal council, composed of members of the municipal council represented on the committee according to the parties' relative weight in the council. The task of this committee is to decide overall policies on school and education matters inside the municipal's jurisdiction. The other school board is the local school board of the individual school, with parental majority, where the school leader serves as board secretary and teachers and students are represented. This school board is supposed to lay out overall principles for the organising of instruction, cooperation between school and home, information for home on the results of students' instruction, the work distribution between the teachers, and common collective activities arrangements for the students (Lov om folkeskolen 1993, § 42–44; Moos 2003).

The political board and the schools superintendents used to be positioned at the midpoint of a straight line or chain of governance from national to institutional level, from the political committee (parliament) and the administrative agency (ministry) at national level to municipal level. The first municipal level is the political committee (municipal council) and administration (municipal administration), the second is a school committee and superintendence. Finally, at the school level, for each school there is the school board, with parental majority and a school leadership. At the midpoint of this chain one will find the schools superintendent, who is positioned in the municipal administration and thus accountable to municipal principles and national regulation while servicing and monitoring schools.

The Danish educational system is part of and thus influenced by transnational tendencies, but building on the Danish structures and culture. By tradition, the municipalities have been important factors in the governance of the public sector, and decentralised educational governance has according to the Danish 'free/independent school' tradition been a central part of the Danish educational self-understanding and, to some extent, also its practice.

This is in line with the systemic evaluation regimes that are in place in all the Nordic countries, in which local government, schools, teachers and pupils are subjected to external evaluation and self-evaluation (Day and Leithwood 2007). Moreover, the state actively uses financial resource allocation in combination with reporting procedures as an indirect control instrument, so that municipalities have to report their use of financial costs and human resources to state agencies on a yearly basis. Finally, accountability is strengthened through making the results of national tests and evaluations available on special websites.

Taken together, the present governance model appears to be a joint regulatory enterprise between the state, through a range of 'hard' and 'soft' steering instruments and quality control, and the municipal sector, through direct ownership and

decentralised decision-making power. There is a ‘mixed mode’ of regulation. This is important for understanding the current context of schools superintendent leadership in the various municipalities in Denmark (Moos 2009).

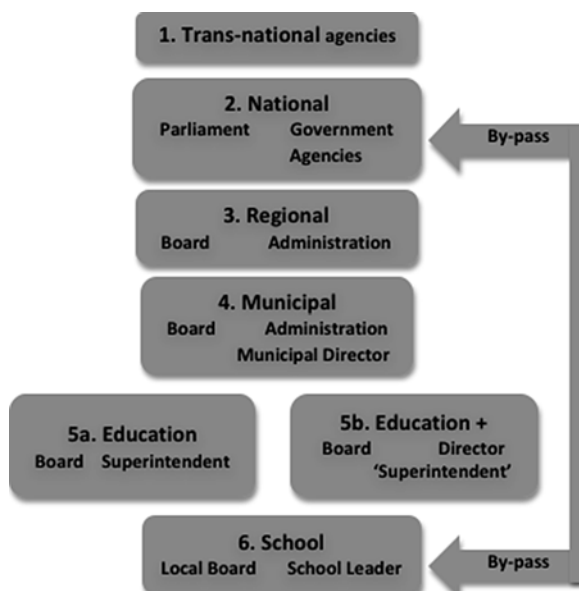
### 3.1 Developments in Public Governance

In numerous municipalities, new layers of middle managers, district-leaders etc., have emerged. This trend is illustrated in Fig. 2.1: from transnational through to national level, through to two-layer municipalities, and on to institutions.

In 1999, vocational schools and, in 2007, the general upper secondary school were restructured. Having previously been governed by regional councils, the upper secondary schools are now self-governed institutions with direct links to the ministry. This arrangement is similar to the governance of free or independent schools in the right hand line of Fig. 2.1. In 2011 there were 509 basic free-standing schools (an increase of 80 or 18 % compared to 429 in 1996). In 2011, 580,000 students attended *folkeskoler* and 96,000 attended free-standing schools, i.e. 14.2 % of all students (Bang 2003).

The overall picture has become more complex than it was 20 years ago, as there are now several main chains of governance. There is the public chain from government through municipal agencies (be they two- or three-layered), and the enterprise model, where schools are made self-steering and refer directly to the ministry. This can be seen as a decentralisation of power over local management of finances and staff and of operations from national level to the schools, but it can also be seen as

**Fig. 2.1** The Danish educational governance system



a move to circumvent local municipal influences and interference. Building on long traditions with independent schools, when it comes to free, primary schools, and on new tendencies also seen in the governance of higher educational institutions, like universities, when it comes to higher secondary schools. This ‘bypass’ of municipal democracy in the municipal councils and administration is a trend that is also seen in initiatives and regulations to govern curriculum and quality assurance from the national level.

## 4 Who Are the Superintendent, the School Board and School Leader?

We shall give short accounts of superintendents, as they describe themselves, and of the two major groups with whom they collaborate – the school board and school leaders – before we describe relations between these three actors in the municipal governance.

There are, as mentioned above, 98 municipalities in Denmark. Each one is a school district, with political boards and administrations with directors. The directors responsible for schools are usually called superintendents. In the survey, however, we found 17 different titles for this position, because more than half of the municipalities have allocated additional areas to the political board and administration such as daycare, leisure time, family matters.

### 4.1 *Characteristics of Superintendents*

*Lead Paragraph* The average superintendent is male, in the mid-50s, and recently appointed. His professional background is education: teacher education and teacher practice. That is slightly out of tune with superintendents’ own criteria for their positions, namely, that candidates should be trained educationalists, administrators, and managers. Important note: there is no ‘average superintendent,’ as the position and the demands made upon it differ from municipality to municipality.

- *Gender*: male (only 25 % are female).
- *Age*: mid-50s (<50 years: 21 % | 51–55 years: 43 % | 56–60 years: 25 % | >60 years: 11 %).
- *Professional seniority*: most are relatively newly appointed (0–5 years: 77 % | 6–10 years: 18 % | >15 years: 5 %).
- *Professional background*: The background of the superintendents is clear and in many ways predictable: 88 % of superintendents were recruited from the educational profession.
- *Academic background*: the professional background resonates with the academic background. Among superintendents, 43 % were trained as teachers, 27 % have

a diploma in leadership, 13 % have a master's degree in the educational field. 16 % have a master's from outside the educational field. When asked if superintendents should be educated to university level, 43 % answered Yes, and said they should have a master's degree.

- *School district's criteria for superintendent positions:* When asked what kind of *qualifications* school districts should look for in superintendent applications, seen from the superintendent perspective we see that the ranking goes from generic leadership competencies, via educational specific competencies, towards administrative/managerial competencies.
- *Appointment procedures:* Following public advertisement, superintendents are appointed by the municipal board. The appointment is typically contract-based, normally lasting 3–5 years.
- *Superintendents' titles:* The restructuring of public sectors over the years has made the position, titles and fields of responsibilities of superintendents rather puzzling. This can be demonstrated by the following list of titles (numbers in brackets indicate the number of times this title was given): superintendent (31), chief of teaching (6), chief of school and youth (2), chief of school and leisure time (2), chief of school and institution (2), and chief of education (2). All other titles on the list were mentioned once each.
- *Next-in-line chief:* Only 11 % of respondents fit the description of superintendent that we used for the survey: 'Being directly subordinate to a political committee and being in charge of all municipal education.' At the same time, 89 % of respondents indicated that they were subordinate to the CEO or to a director. Most of the respondents have as their field of responsibility a broad field of education – childcare, adult education, culture and social affairs – and they are subordinate to other managers. All, however, are in charge of municipal education.

## 4.2 *Characteristics of School Board Members and Chairs*

*Lead Paragraph* The average school board chair is male and in their mid-40s. The board members are in their 30s, and the chairs in their 50s. Many chairs have served on boards for more than 6 years, while board members have served for a shorter period, the current term. Both chairs and members are publicly employed and educated slightly above the national average. While all board members are appointed by the municipal council, they belong to the political parties of the city council. In the recent election term, one party was over-represented on school boards, the Socialist People's Party. All of the members took on this post because they were personally interested in education, and often they were employed in education. The chair accepted the office because they saw it as a good position in which to exercise political power.

- *Gender:* The majority of chairs are male (73 %), while the distribution of members (55 % male and 45 % female) is closer to the national average distribution.

- *Age*: The age of chairs is very equally distributed from 20 to more than 58 years, while members are generally younger, with half of them aged between 20 and 48.
- *Board seniority*: 55 % of chairs have been on the board for 6 or more years, while only half as many members have served for this amount of time.
- *Employment*: The proportion of publicly employed policy board members is much higher than the national average – 57 % for members and 65 % for chairs, as compared to 43 %<sup>3</sup> – and the number of privately employed members is lower than the national average. The overwhelming proportion of municipal politicians are publicly employed. Almost half are employed in the education sector.
- *Education*: The educational level of members and chairs is slightly higher than the national average,<sup>4</sup> since the percentage having completed only basic school education is lower (approximately 20 % compared to 30 %), while percentage having completed higher secondary is higher (20 % compared to 10 %). The percentage having completed tertiary education is almost the same (around 60 %).
- *Political representation*: Members of the political board are politically appointed by the city council and by the members of the city council, following a rule of proportionality. This means that political parties are represented on city councils and on political boards according to the distribution of votes they receive in the election. Therefore, in principle, the composition of the political board reflects the election result.
- *Reason for joining the school board*: When subjects were asked why they had accepted a position on the political board, two main reasons stood out. Firstly, that education was their personal interest – and often their occupation – and a high priority for their political party (approximately half of the members and chairs answered this). Secondly, that these positions provided them and their political party with an important opportunity to influence development in the municipality (approximately one-third of the members and chairs answered this).

### 4.3 Characteristics of School Leaders

*Lead Paragraph* The average primary school leader is male and more than 56 years of age. They have been recently appointed from a teacher's position and with leadership training.

<sup>3</sup>Nyt fra Danmarks Statistik, Dec. 2012: <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2012/NR657.pdf>. The numbers are corrected by removing students and the retired, etc., approximately equal to the national numbers out of employment (30–40 % of the total population).

<sup>4</sup><http://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/befolkningens-uddannelsesniveau/befolkningens-hoejst-fuldfoerte-uddannelse.aspx>. December 2012.

- *Age*: Half of the school leaders are older than 56 years (20–45 years: 22 % | 46–55 years: 30 % | >56 years: 50 %).<sup>5</sup>
- *Gender*: 63 % were men and 37 % female.
- *Leadership seniority*: The number of very experienced school leaders is low, while the experienced and novice groups are large (0–10 years: 45 % | 11–20 years: 41 % | >21 years: 15 %).
- *Education*: 95 % were trained as teachers, of whom 58 % have a further leadership training.
- *Position*: 97 % of respondents head basic schools (folkeskoler: primary and lower secondary, from kindergarten class through ninth grade).
- *Next-in-line chief*: area leader: 17 %, superintendent: 58 %, director of department: 13 %.

### *Comments on Relations Between Superintendent, School Board and School Leaders*

One might expect collaboration between these groups of municipal actors to be easy, considering the social and cultural capital they bring to the collaboration, with education and educational training as the shared professional background. This comparison only holds, however, when taking the averages as a point of comparison. When going more into detail and emphasising strong tendencies, we would find differences. More superintendents are now coming from other professional fields (managerial fields); school leaders are increasingly subject to management training; and the school boards are increasingly engaged in a broader field of institutions and tasks, which could attract a politically more diverse group of candidates.

## 5 Networks

Superintendents indicate that they prioritise *meeting school-leader groups over meeting leaders in the administration*. School boards are not mentioned in these sets of responses, because superintendents apparently do not see them as leadership groups. Nevertheless we chose to analyse data on superintendents networking with administrative networks, school boards, school leaders and peers.

### 5.1 *Municipal Networks*

*Lead Paragraph* Superintendents' field of work is being enlarged to cover the whole of children's lives from one through 18 years. They are also becoming involved in municipal governance beyond their particular field of work, in order to

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<sup>5</sup>In a survey from 2001 (Moos 2001), only 23 % were more than 56 years, while 56 % were 45–55 years and 235 were 'young' leaders.

partake in shared municipal coordination and policymaking to which they are supposed to be very loyal. The feel they are autonomous with plenty of room for manoeuvre – as long as they engage themselves with budget and finances. Unfortunately they find exactly these tasks less interesting and meaningful.

Superintendents participate in several working groups or networks with the municipal CEO or director on the management of crosscutting and overarching municipal tasks. When they prioritise *relations with the municipality CEO*, this includes them in the municipal management and leadership over and above their initial field of work. Superintendents indicated the following priorities: (1) I can also influence decisions outside my resort, education; (2) I see myself as part of the overarching municipal administration; (3) My main task is to lead development of the quality of education; (4) My main task is to defend my resort; (5) I see myself more as the representative of the ministry of education. The answers to these two questions clearly show that superintendents see themselves as members of the municipal administrative leadership, with prior loyalties to the municipal education and administration.

The main purposes reported of meetings with superiors and peers in the municipal administration are: coordination and producing development and coherence in the whole sector, across sectors and across the whole municipality. *These groups most often meet* once a month or every week.

Superintendents *participate in many (mostly between three and five) ad hoc municipal groups* in order to produce policy papers, administrative routines etc. Thus they experience being part of the municipal leadership when they participate in these overarching and coordinating meetings with leaders at several levels from several sectors.

### 5.1.1 Coupling with Superiors

As described by the superintendents, it seems that the formal couplings between themselves and their superiors are rather informal: Only 33 % of superintendents claim *they have a written job description*. The rest do not have one, but they indicate *that they are governed by*: my calendar, common sense, ad hoc tasks, firefighting, own judgements, tasks from the director, school leader approaches, political initiatives, etc.

Ninety-five per cent of the *respondents are assessed by their superiors*, annually (80 %) or every half year (11 %). Nine per cent are assessed by their political leaders. The main *reasons for assessment are*, in prioritised sequence: (1) in order to be accountable to known expectations, (2) in order to identify areas that need improvement, (3) to contribute to continuous political development, (4) in order to describe relevant goals, and (5) to identify strengths.

In answer to the question: '*How do you perceive the degree of your autonomy?*' 83 % replied in the two top categories, indicating that they feel they have plenty of room for manoeuvre. When reading the responses to other questions, however, it

seems that the feeling of autonomy is diminished because they have to prioritise most time for 'budget and finances' even if they find this *area less interesting and meaningful* in the section on superintendents' functions.

There is a weak tendency to see themselves as being *more policymakers than implementation-responsible administrators*.

#### *Comments on Relations Between Superintendents and Superiors*

Superintendents collaborate and frequently meet with superiors in municipal networks or working groups. They feel that they have plenty of room for manoeuvre, also for acting as policymakers.

## **5.2 School Boards as Networks**

*Lead Paragraph* School boards say that the two most important tasks for them are quality and curriculum, and structure and economy. Superintendents, on the other hand, expect school boards to develop and implement local initiatives and reforms, and to create conditions for collaboration between schools. However, the actual work of school boards differs from both sets of expectations as the most frequently mentioned items in meetings are economy, resources and budget issues, and information from the educational administration. Meeting practice is closer to the chairs' expectations than to those of superintendents.

There seems to be a political wish to have the board oversee the whole range of upbringing and education, from year 1 to year 18, and across the whole spectrum of daycare and school life: children and family, childcare, leisure time and secondary schooling. It is particularly preschools and primary schools that are mentioned, which is to be expected since daycare and primary schools are part of the municipality's responsibility. Chairs and members of the school boards observe that *many boards now have a wider area of responsibility*, as shown in the range of titles for the board: 66 % of titles mentioned by the chairs and 78 % of those mentioned by the members have the word 'children' in the title of the school board. Forty-two per cent of the chairs and 45 % of the members mention the title as 'something' with school or education. These titles encompass a broad field, signalling that the board in general covers the whole range of children's education and lives.

*Issues most frequently processed in school board meetings* are 'economy, resources, and budget issues,' 'information from the school administration,' and 'information from the superintendent.' These priorities can be explained by the fact that the school board is primarily an economic board that listens to the information from the administrative managers. It is very seldom that the school board deals with individual problems. It is in line with the forecast, expressed in the answers to the question: *Which – three – issues/areas are the most important for the board for this office period?*



1. *Quality and curriculum*: student learning, learning environment and teaching (board members 33 % | chairs 15 %)
2. *Structure and economy*: structure of schools and institutions, economy (board members 27 % | chairs 34 %)
3. *Daycare and youth education*: bridging the transfer between institutions (board members 14 % | chairs 21 %)
4. *Inclusion* of all students in schools and institutions (board members 12 % | chairs 12 %)
5. *Special needs education, coherent politics* (children age 3–18) and ICT (board members 14 % | chairs 20 %)

Members emphasise quality and curriculum twice as much as chairs do. Structure and economy is high for both groups, while chairs stress institutions outside schools more than members do.

The focus on structure certainly reflects the fact that, at the time of the survey, political boards were in their second election term and had recently experienced extensive municipal restructuring. Additionally, in recent years the government has been cutting funding to municipalities, so finances remain a challenging issue for the political board. Therefore a lot of detailed structuring and planning was needed at this level.

We can see that superintendents have clear *understandings of what the school board expects from them*. The expectations were ranked almost at the same level: to develop and implement local initiatives and reforms; to create conditions for collaboration between schools; to evaluate the results of local initiatives; to collaborate with the political committee; to lead school leaders in their educational leading; to create changes that give better financial outcomes; to create changes that produce better results at national tests; to create conditions for collaboration with other municipal institutions; to develop and implement national reforms; to evaluate results of national reforms at local level; and to lead education (curriculum and teaching).

### 5.2.1 Influence

*Lead Paragraph* Both school boards and superintendents think they have a great deal of influence on the development of education in their municipality – even if economy is what they do in meetings. Both parties agree that the most important person on the school board is the chair, while the superintendent has only moderate influence on board decisions. When it comes to influencing schools and other institutions, school boards find themselves more influential than the superintendent, who in their view is not really competent to lead the dialogue with schools. It is worth noticing that superintendents identify school leaders as their most important network below school boards.

When asked about their perception of *the school board's political influence 'upwards,' on municipal governance*, chairs and members believe they are indeed influential, and particularly so in strategic decisions and economic prioritising within their area of responsibility. Regarding the assessment of influence by the school board members and the chair on the board's decisions, the chairs feel they have a larger influence than do the members, which is arguably to be expected since the chairs often command a majority on the board behind them. They also consider themselves able to set the agenda for how schools prioritise. However, this was not prioritised as highly as the former items.

Superintendents find the following levels of *influence on local educational politics*: Politicians in our municipality are very interested in schools and education; Local quality assessments and evaluations influence decisions on committee; National quality assessments and evaluations influence decisions on committee; The chair of the Municipal Board has the biggest influence on educational politics; As the superintendent, I can influence the local educational politics.

The political interest in education in general and in quality assurance/assessment is high. This goes for both local initiatives and initiatives originating at national level.

When it comes to personal influence, superintendents point to the chair of the municipal board, the mayor. This could be an indication of a steep hierarchy in local governance: the top positions make the most important decisions, even if the structure of the political construction points to rather considerable decentralisations from the top down towards committees and their political members and chairs.

At the same time there seems to be an image of clear demarcation lines between the political actors and the civil servant: the superintendent.

The chairs and members of the school board think *the board is very important 'downwards'* for the development of schools, which is part of the board's area of responsibility. They also believe that the municipal council takes the board's views on educational matters into consideration. Both board members and chairs thus consider themselves to be important in the municipal development of the schools. On the other hand, both chairs and members think that the municipal school administration can exercise only moderate influence over the boards' decisions, and that the school administration is only moderately able to lead the dialogue with schools about quality reports, to suggest solutions on problems in the school sector, or to analyse the national tests. The board members and chairs do not hold the school administration in the same high esteem.

### 5.2.2 Board Processes and Procedures

*Lead Paragraph* Relations between the politically appointed school boards and professionally selected superintendents are changing at present, although expectations and rhetoric do not change: school boards are expected to engage in long-term strategies and development, and superintendents are expected to serve them as civil

servants. In real life, superintendent are taking more and more over, drawing up the agenda for the meeting, and of course being employed full time, whereas school board chairs can only spend 2–5 h preparing for each meeting, and members even less. Even if school boards claim that the most important sources of information are teachers and political colleagues, the fact is that the superintendent is the information channel to school board: all communication from schools (leaders, teachers, parents and students) is channelled through the superintendent and the educational administration. This is because the leadership of schools and other institutions is considered to be part of the administration to which they need to give total loyalty. None of the school board members and chairs has formal links to schools.

There appear to be very few examples of municipalities in which there is a *contact politician from the board to the schools*. The formal contacts are on the administrative level. In spite of this, both chairs and members have a good knowledge of the schools. Ninety per cent of the chairs and 74 % of the members visit the schools at least once during the semester. However, we are unable to establish whether this is for private or professional reasons.

*Political decisions in the school board* are characterised by unanimity, to the extent that 61 % (nearly two-thirds) of chairs and 41 % of members say that decisions are unanimous. The difference between chairs and members can be explained by the fact that chairs often represent a majority on the board and therefore are more focused on the unanimous aspect than members, and that it is minority members that focus on the majority decisions.

*Regarding who decides the school board's agenda for its meetings*, the board members' answers are relatively clear: the decisions are increasingly being taken over by the administrative and judicial civil servants in the municipal administrations. Again, there is a difference between chair and member opinions, as 55 % of chairs and 35 % of members think the superintendent determines the agenda; however, a similar percentage in both groups (31 and 34 %) claimed that the chair decides. Municipal politics is becoming increasingly professionalised – or depoliticised – in the sense that elected members feature in the administration and strategic thinking is being played down.

*From whom do you get the most important information for your work on the political board* was a question that could indicate how important other actors or networks are to chairs. In order of priority, these actors are: teachers, other political parties, national evaluations, the internet, students, and media reports on schools. The least important informants are the school administration and the superintendent. It is difficult to interpret this picture, but one could assume that chairs and members are 'blinded by proximity,' since the professionals and the administration are their main formal sources of information. However, as the response rate for this question was very low, it is not possible to infer a great deal from these figures.

#### *Comments on Superintendents' Relations with School Boards*

The school boards' main tasks are seen as the economy, resources and budgeting, and secondly as structuring educational system and quality. Therefore they

influence politicians in this high-priority area. School boards and superintendents have differing views on superintendents' influence on school boards, but superintendents are seen to be gradually taking over more policymaking, especially when it comes to administrative and legal issues. Although school boards are further up in the political hierarchy than superintendents, they find that their relations with school leaders are more important than those with school board. School boards and superintendents have surprisingly diverse perceptions of many aspects of both parties' work and relations.

### 5.3 *Networks: School Leaders*

*Lead Paragraph* Superintendents indicate that to them the most important actors in the municipal governance are school leaders. This is confusing, as there is a strong tendency to have superintendents taking care of multiple institutions and thus unable to collaborate closely with all of them. An explanation could be that the survey respondents are responsible for education and thus subordinate to the director of a wider field of institutions. This is consistent with them having no governance level between themselves and school leaders. The main purpose of the collaboration is giving support to school leaders and leaving school leadership to them. There are few direct connections between superintendents and teachers. Superintendents meet frequently with school leaders to give information from the municipal level and to discuss school development, continuous professional development and student development. School leaders are rather satisfied with these meetings, the annual or so conferences, and the support on administration, budgeting, legal issues, etc., that they can get from the superintendents' administration. They indicate that school boards primarily expect them to focus on budget, secondly on implementing national legislation, and thirdly on their capacity to lead education in their schools.

School leaders are the primary subordinates to or collaborators with superintendents. They describe their collaboration in terms of educational leadership, sparring, and fostering school development strategies and student learning. They communicate person to person in mentoring and sparring processes. And they support school leaders in thinking strategically.

#### 5.3.1 *Relations and Tasks*

Relations between superintendents and school leaders are direct, as only 7 % of the superintendents said there is another *level of leadership between themselves and school leaders*. In other research projects (Lejf Moos and Kofod 2009), we hear school leaders in the new, larger municipalities complain that the ongoing and direct communication between school leadership and local administration/superintendent has been transformed into written communication. They complain that they seldom

have the chance to meet with the superintendent because they have so many institutions to look after. They therefore write many policies and principles.

School boards expect superintendents to play the active part in quality assurance with schools. When the administration finds that a school is underperforming, the superintendent is expected to take it up with school leaders. School boards can examine and discuss the situation, but are not active compared with school leaders.

Superintendents prioritise the face-to-face interactions with school leaders in the following areas: communication and sparring, but also work in respect of the school, municipal organisation, and the quality reports. The communication builds on the fact that both parties are educational professionals. Respondents were asked to write *the three most important tasks in their work with school leaders*:

- Priorities 1 and 2 by far surpass the rest. The focus here is on communicating with school leaders and on their development. Superintendents here indicate their interest in guiding the leaders of schools and giving them support.
- Priorities 3–6 are high priorities, focusing on developing the school organisation and school district, attitudes and resources. Sixth is working on the quality reports (we shall come back to this topic in a special section).
- Priorities 7–11 are middle-tier priorities and are rather mixed. They include: working environment, political decisions, strategies, decision-making and operations. These are issues of importance to school leadership on a general level and revolve around the question what the municipal administration can do to support development in schools.

*Leading school leaders with respect to student outcome* is done through accountability instruments and social technologies such as tests, quality reports and ‘best practice,’ and also through continuous political development.

One may wonder why the item ‘Making teacher focus’ is so low on the list. A number of superintendents made remarks on this: this is not my responsibility, it is the responsibility of the school leader, they write. The ninth priority, ‘Making use of research,’ indicates that the contemporary trend to focus on ‘evidence-based practice’ may not have reached this level in the educational system. Superintendents indicate that the focus is a mix of general structural, school and personal development on the organisational level. There is no focus on individual student learning, but on the means by which school districts can influence learning: that is, through supporting and organising the professionals and the frames for learning.

### 5.3.2 Forms of Relations

Superintendents do much of their work in meetings with subordinates (school and other institutional leaders), peers (other superintendents and leaders at the same level) and their superiors (municipal top managers, political leaders).

*Meetings with subordinates* are:

1. Groups with school leaders and leisure-time institution leaders (32 %)

2. Groups with school leaders (30 %)
3. Groups with school leaders and middle-level leaders in the administration (22 %).

The most *important tasks in those networks* are: strategy and development, coordination and collaboration, followed by operations and development, sparring and exchange of experiences, and, at the bottom end, the development of learning and teaching: 'With the main task to:....' These groups meet every week (13 %), every 2 weeks (26 %), once a month (57 %), or less frequently (2 %): 'How often does this group meet?'

An overall picture of the interaction between school leaders and their superintendents is that the day-to-day operations and strategies are taken in regular meetings, while the deeper educational discussions are taken in infrequent conferences.

When asked if a *school leader should be educated* at university level, 37 % answered Yes. Of those who were favoured a university education, half said a diploma and half a master's degree.

### 5.3.3 Leader Expectations of School Administration

School leaders respond that *they can have assistance from the municipal level* on these tasks: administration (60 %), budgeting (63 %), economic administration (73 %), health (67 %), law (96 %), and staff management (95 %).

*School leaders find relatively high levels of expertise in the municipal administration.* The highest levels are mentioned in the fields of law, school politics and school leaders' qualifications, and the lowest are in the analysis of learning outcomes and the development of curricula. There is a clear picture of administrations skilled in organisational matters, but less skilled in educational matters.

*School leaders report that superintendents make use of initiatives that are supportive to their work.* High priority is given to meetings, dialogue and leadership education. Interesting are a relatively small number of responses, saying: the superintendent does nothing. Superintendents call their school leaders to meetings. The majority of these involve giving information, and considerably fewer concern education, quality and development of competencies.

We asked school leaders which *factors the superintendents stressed when assessing school leaders' work*. Most frequently mentioned (71 %) was assessing whether the school leader was performing according to known expectations, the next (56 %) was school leaders' ability to implement the policies of the school board, and third (32 %) was contribution to their professional development.

### 5.3.4 Leaders' Expectations of School Board

*School leaders perceive that school board expectations of them are very high* (82 %) on keeping to budget, lower (58 %) on implementing new school acts, and lower still (53 %) on the ability to lead education in my school. Other expectations were given lower than 50 % scores.

*School leaders themselves expect to perform at a high level in leading education (89 %), lower on implementing new school laws (47 %), and even lower on keeping to budget (42 %).*

#### *Comments on Superintendents' Relations with School Leaders*

Superintendents see school leaders as their primary collaborators. Superintendents act as leaders/critical friends to school leaders, while coaching them on educational as well as administrative issues. Much of the quality control is distributed to school leaders (on student outcomes and teachers' teaching), giving personal advice and leadership education, and offering expert support from the municipal administration.

### **5.4 Networks: Peers**

*Lead Paragraph* Many superintendents indicate that collaborating with peers is important, but they seem not to make much use of it.

Peer networks are described as important in day-to-day work. This is where new challenges, tasks and opportunities are discussed and explored. These networks could be described as learning communities, but they are rather loosely coupled.

Work in networks of peers is described as: professional development, inspiration, sparring, knowledge-sharing, community-building, and maintaining and discussing political issues. Many superintendents describe the experience as a tight working community or collaboration with peers. These could be the outlines of professional learning communities bound together by a shared repertoire, shared tasks, and shared aims.

Two peer networks are mentioned most often: the superintendent association, and the superintendents in the region. Here superintendents find professional development, inspiration, sparring, knowledge-sharing, community, meet the politicians and discuss political issues: *'Are you a member of networks that work with school/educational issues?'*

On a scale from 1 to 6 (from Do not agree to Fully agree) superintendents were asked *how they profited from meetings with peers*. Some results are here the sum up of replies agree categories 4–6 (the high end):

1. 48 % responded that they 'experience a tight working community with peers'
2. 36 % responded that they 'collaborate with peers on many issues'
3. 30 % responded that they 'often contacted other superintendents to get advice'
4. But only 16 % positively answered the question: 'The collaboration with peers is more important than the collaboration with local actors.'

### *Comments on Superintendents' Relations with Peers*

Support from peers from outside the municipality is valued very highly by superintendents, except for 16 %, who rated it less highly than collaboration with local actors.

## **6 What Are the Superintendent's Motivational Forces**

*Lead Paragraph* Most often superintendents attribute the greatest importance to general policy and planning issues (political issues, development of schools, school development, budgeting and the generation of goals), and less attention to day-to-day issues such as financing, pedagogy, etc. Simultaneously, superintendents strive to develop schools and pedagogy, as well as supporting school leaders in their handling of staff. Subsequently they find it important to achieve goals set by the local council or the school board, as well as to advise politicians. Pedagogy in the sense of school development is presumably seen as an important issue for a superintendent, while in the sense of day-to-day practice it presumably is not.

In answer to the question what was their *most important task as superintendents*, popular answers were: development of the school and the pedagogy in use (48 %), management of school leaders and supporting school leaders' handling of staff (38 %), the achievement of goals set by the local council (30 %), and advice to politicians (32 %).

In answer to the question what were the *most important tasks for the chairman of the school board*, the most chosen options were: achieving the general objective and school politics, supporting and monitoring the school structure and overall school development, and managing negotiations in the school board.

Comparing answers from the *superintendents* in which they point out the most important tasks, the most time-consuming tasks and the most popular tasks, the following choices come up as the most frequent, all chosen by 14–18 % of the responses:

| Most important                | Most time-consuming           | Most interesting              |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Development of schools        | Budget and financing          | Development of schools        |
| 93 %                          | 95 %                          | 97 %                          |
| Political issues              | Development of schools        | Pedagogical leadership        |
| 92 %                          | 93 %                          | 97 %                          |
| Planning and generating goals | Planning and generating goals | Political issues              |
| 90 %                          | 92 %                          | 93 %                          |
| Budget and financing          | Political issues              | Planning and generating goals |
| 86 %                          | 90 %                          | 88 %                          |



As becomes clear in the table, the three lists show distinct but very similar patterns. Political issues, work with development of schools, and planning and generating goals appear on all three lists, while budget and financing is in the top four regarding importance and time consumption, but not interest. On the other hand, pedagogical leadership appears in the top four interesting issues, but not in the top four issues which are important or time-consuming.

*Comments on Importance, Time Consumed and Degree of Interest Ascribed by Superintendents*

The table shows how *political issues* are ascribed greater priority when it comes to importance than when it comes to time allocation and – especially – interest, while pedagogical leadership only figures among the top four in the ‘Most interesting’ column. These few examples from the three lists indicate how superintendents work particularly with more general, long-term and strategic issues rather than more day-to-day issues. They also indicate a kind of tension between the three different lists: budget and financing, for example, is fourth on the list of importance, but first on the list for most time-consuming, yet does not figure on the list for most interesting. In an ideal world one might claim that the three lists should be identical. In this way there would be agreement between the importance, the time needed and how interesting an issue was. That this is only partly the case might indicate a tension between what is personally interesting for a superintendent and what is politically and organisationally necessary for an organisation.

Part of the tension might have to do with the fact that what the superintendent considers to be necessary can conflict with what (s)he considers to be interesting. Most superintendents were trained as teachers and could thus be expected to have schools and pedagogy close to their heart, while their relation to issues like administration and finance might be more on a need-to-know basis.

## **6.1 How to Bridge the National and Local Levels**

*Lead Paragraph* Among the various national school reforms, the superintendents point to the school quality report as that which influences their work the most. Additionally, they tend to agree that national quality assessments and evaluations affect decisions in the school board, which is why they must be pleased that they do not find it difficult to motivate school leaders to work on such issues. School leaders are satisfied with how superintendents guide work on development of schools. When it comes to future reforms, the superintendents seems to prefer a higher degree of local influence on such issues.

Few of the superintendents experience that their work has been affected by international tests and assessment of knowledge. Few superintendents find it difficult to motivate the school board to make changes which originate from national decisions.

A majority of *superintendents tend to agree that national quality assessments and evaluations affect decisions in the school board.*

A little more than half the *school leaders assess that superintendents are giving good and competent guidance to school leaders* in their governance and in the work with development of schools.

Asked to *prioritise national school reforms according to the importance* each reform has for their work as superintendents, superintendents replied that the most significant resources are: the school quality report (61 %), pupil plans (26 %), the national tests (21 %), and political demands on youth education for all (14 %).

It is thus by far the *school quality report* that is assigned the greatest importance for their work.

Asked to point out *future reforms they would like to see* implemented, superintendents' answers are distributed over quite a range of possibilities. The most popular of these are: a higher degree of autonomy for the local administration and the school (16 %), the abolition of the concept of the school class (14 %), a focus on coherence and entirety (14 %), and the comprehensive school (11 %).

#### *Comments on Wishes for Future Reforms*

The abolition of the school class as we know it (around 30 pupils in a class) might add flexibility in planning teaching, since the teacher–pupil ratio could then be varied quite a bit more than is possible at present. In the Danish debate some argue that this might turn out to be a way to cut back on funding even further than today. Others argue that increased flexibility in planning would make it possible to invite interesting people from outside the school for just a single lecture, because a large group of children could profit.

Overall, the answers above indicate a general interest in decentralised influence on the school, which might indicate that local administrations both in the municipality and in individual schools experience the cost–benefit ratio as being to schools' disadvantage. This could indicate that schools and municipalities feel that value added does not correspond with the resources needed for the implementation of these initiatives and reforms.

## **6.2 What Do the Superintendents Prioritise?**

*Lead Paragraph* Superintendents find it important that the chairman of the school board and the school leaders do manage overall objectives, and that they are effective in setting directions and implementing policies concerning the schools. Likewise, they find it important that school leaders care for the school structure and for school development. As part of this endeavour, the superintendents expect school leaders to chair and to set the agenda for work in the local school board for their specific school.

According to the superintendents, *the most important tasks (picked by at least 10 %) for the chairmen to attend to* were: the management of overall objectives,

directions and policies, development of the general school structure, and chairing negotiations in the local school board, including setting the agenda.

When we asked the superintendents '*What are the most important tasks which chairmen of the school boards expect you to take care of?*' the same tasks as above were the most popular. In other answers, fewer respondents noted issues such as dealing with complaints, producing unbiased and professional presentations on issues which are part of the political agenda, being well informed on what is going on, following up on specific single issues, being aware of the relation between citizens' needs and the politics pursued, and organising inspections of schools.

Our research identified five important tasks for superintendents. We asked them to prioritise these tasks, from the most to the least important:

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Implementing the visions, tasks and goals of the organisation in order to facilitate employees realising them   | 36 % |
| Anchoring political expectations and clarifying the local achievement goals                                     | 32 % |
| Working to implement the organisational changes necessary for employees to be able to do their jobs effectively | 30 % |
| Consulting with, shaping and actively leading the professional staff  | 23 % |
| Supporting others in performing their work by providing them with necessary materials and resources             | 11 % |

### *Comments on Superintendents, School boards and Chairmen of Local School Boards*

For the superintendents, the important issues for school leaders to address are those issues connected to the particular school. That is, the adaptation and implementation of overall objectives, directions and policies, as well as the suitable development of the school structure, chairing negotiations in the local school board, and setting the agenda. Given that a school leader is normally leader of a specific school, while the superintendents lead all schools in the municipality, these expectations are hardly surprising. In the present management structure, the superintendent cannot, and is not supposed to, interfere directly on the school level.

## **7 How Superintendents Get Information/Knowledge**

*Lead Paragraph* The most important source of information on the real situations on schools and on school leaders' and teachers' circumstances is meetings and conferences with school leaders in the municipality. Most superintendents participate in or arrange such meetings on a regular basis.

Most *superintendents meet school leaders regularly* in internal conferences on day-to-day matters (S48), in which sharing of information is part of the formal programme.

Insight into the real situation in each school is seldom the primary reason for dialogues, networking, mentoring and counselling, but they contribute to it. So the fact that almost every superintendent has one to three management groups, as became clear above, does contribute to gaining insight. That many *superintendents discuss a series of issues with superintendents from other municipalities* also makes a contribution.

#### *Comments on How Superintendents Gain Insight*

As is made clear above, the most important – and perhaps therefore the most used – source of information is the regular meetings with school leaders and politicians.

## **8 Accountability and Responsibility**

In what follows, we give an account of the superintendents' own perceptions of the actors or bodies to whom they feel accountable and what they feel responsible for. The chapter is divided into three paragraphs:

### ***8.1 Issues Delegated by Politicians to the Superintendent***

*Lead Paragraph* Not surprisingly, the closer the issue to the school's core business – the teaching and democratic *Bildung* of children – the more the professional issues are stressed.

Superintendents, board members and chairs are concerned with overarching matters such as the school economy, organisation, and leading the lower layers of the schooling system in the municipalities.

#### **8.1.1 Superintendents**

To the question '*How many municipal leadership groups are you presently a member of?*' – they may produce policy, action plans, administrative routines – the superintendents answer that they participate in several (for most, three to five) ad hoc municipal groups in order to produce policy papers, administrative routines, etc. Superintendents experience being part of the municipal leadership when they participate in these overarching coordinating meetings with leaders at several levels from several sectors.

In response to the question *What does your chair expect of you?* the superintendents' priorities are:

1. To take care of complaints
2. To give a professional description of issues to the committee and to prepare clear and worked-through descriptions for the committee agenda

3. To give a good orientation about what is going on in the district and to follow up on individual cases
4. To establish links between the politics and citizens' needs
5. To monitor schools
6. To work loyally to implement the political decisions in dialogue with the leaders of institutions.

The second and third priorities are important leadership tasks. This is where decisions are prepared, because the *premises* for decision-making are being constructed, indicating the field and the persons where political decisions can be made. The next priorities point to the *connection* phase of the decision-making processes: what is happening to decisions, and who is monitoring and leading these processes.

Seeing decision as a three-phase process (constructing premises, decision-making, and connecting), we can see that the superintendents assign themselves – or are assigned – very important functions in relation to policymaking (Moos 2009), much in line with the preparation for legislation and regulations made in formal and informal networks as described by superintendents.

### 8.1.2 Board Members and Chairs

Chairs and members of school boards find that many of them have recently acquired wider areas of responsibilities, as shown in the range of board titles (1): 66 % of the titles mentioned by chairs, and 78 % for members, have the word 'children' in the title of the school board. Forty-two per cent of the chairs and 45 % of members mention the title as 'something' with school or education. These are rather broad denominations, signalling that the *board in general covers the whole range of children's lives and education*.

There seems to be a political desire to have the board oversee the whole range of daycare and school life from years 1 to 18: children and family, daycare, leisure time, and secondary schooling. Preschool and primary school schooling activities are mentioned particularly, as might be expected because daycare and primary schools are part of the municipalities' responsibility.

## 8.2 Mediating

*Lead Paragraph* On the whole the superintendent sees his/her role predominantly as the manager of the municipal schooling system. The most important tasks are taking local initiatives, collaborating with the committee, and keeping track of the financial sides of the schooling system in order to optimise the financial situation.

The school leaders see themselves and their roles more as a mixture of manager and leader. It seems important that the school leaders can do both.

### 8.2.1 Superintendents

All the items were ranked very high – from 85 to 48 % – with very few differences in answer to the question ‘*What does the committee expect of you?*’. The answers were: to develop and implement local initiatives and reforms; to create conditions for collaboration between schools; to evaluate the results of local initiatives; to collaborate with the political committee; to guide school leaders in their educational leading; to create changes that give better financial outcomes; to create changes that produce better results in national tests; to create conditions for collaboration with other municipal institutions; to develop and implement national reforms; to evaluate the results of national reforms at local level; and to lead education (curriculum and teaching).

### 8.2.2 School Leaders

The following three questions are assessed by the school leaders on a Likert scale of 1–6. We focus on the two highest-scoring answers to the question ‘*How high do you find the demands made of you by the school board in the following fields?*’ The school leaders answer: managing the school budget (99 %), implementing legislation (78 %), and leading the education in my school (76 %). The two highest scores focus on the formal roles of the school leader as the financial and judicial officer responsible for the school. That is in accordance with the trend in recent years for responsibility to be rolled out from the municipal administration to the school. The third issue mentioned by school leaders concerns their role as the professional responsible for the content of the school, the instruction.

To the question ‘*How high do you experience the state’s expectations of you as being as leader in the following fields?*’ the school leaders answer: implementing legislation (69 %), implementing revised curricula (78 %), and leading the education in my school (76 %). Not unsurprisingly, answers to this question emphasise formal issues because the distance (both physical and mental) between the particular school and the state is greater than that between the school and the committee or municipal administration with responsibility for oversight of the school leader. The interesting thing is, however, that as many as one-quarter of the answers stress the local pedagogical issue regardless of this distance.

To the question ‘*What work tasks do you yourself consider the most important in your present position?*’ the school leaders answer: leading education in my school (99 %), developing the inner organisation of the school (93 %), and providing support for needy students (93 %). The highest- and lowest-ranked answers concern the school leader’s role as leader of the content of the school and manager of student achievement of their goals, whereas the third question concerns their role as school

manager responsible for keeping the school's organisation in order. So the school leaders' expectations of themselves stress both their role as manager and that as leader of the school.

*According to school leaders, what are expectations on their work?*

| School leaders' expectation of themselves   | School Board expectations of school leaders | State's expectations of school leaders    |
|---|---|---|
| Leading the educational work in my school   | Managing the school budget                  | Implementing new legislation on schools   |
| 99 %  | 99 %  | 83 %                                      |
| Developing the inner work organisation to achieve higher effectiveness                | Implementing new legislation on schools     | Implementing revised curricula            |
| 93 %  | 78 %  | 74 %                                      |
| Ensuring that students who are unable to achieve the goals are given adequate support | Leading the educational work in my school   | Leading the educational work in my school |
| 93 %  | 76 %  | 51 %                                      |

## 8.3 Important Tasks

### 8.3.1 Superintendents

Regarding the relative importance of tasks, the superintendents' responses to the question '*Research has identified five very important tasks that superintendents fulfil*' are quite similar to those in: The superintendents were asked to rank the statements on a scale from 1 to 6, with 1 as the most important. Weighted numbers were produced. The superintendents answered: 'Anchoring political expectations and make local results clear,' 'Implementing visions, tasks and goals in order to support their implementation by staff,' 'Entering into dialogue, forming and leading the professional staff actively,' 'Implementing changes in the organisation needed for staff to work effectively,' and 'Supporting others' performance by supplying material and resources.'

The priorities were very close, with no significant differences. But the items are also very close. The first stated priority concerns relations between the political and the professional level, whereas numbers 2–5 concern relations between the municipal administration and school level, or between superintendent and administration staff. All items received high scores.

### 8.3.2 Board Members and Chairs

Board members and board chairs answered the question: ‘*Which issues are the most important for the board for this office period?*’ This was an open-ended question, which we have categorised into five groups:

1. *Quality and curriculum*: student learning, including learning environment and teaching (board members 33 %, board chairs 15 %).
2. *Structure and economy*: reforming the structure of schools and daycare institutions, economy (board members 27 %, chairs 34 %).
3. *Daycare and youth education*: bridging the transfer between institutions (board members 14 %, chairs 21 %).
4. *Inclusion* of all students in schools and institutions (board members 12 %, chairs 12 %).
5. *Special needs education, coherent politics* [attention to children age 3–18], and *ICT* (board members 14 %, chairs 20 %).

Board members stress quality and the curriculum twice as often as chairs. Structure and economy is high for both groups, while chairs stress institutions outside schools more than members.

The focus on structure certainly reflects the fact that political boards were in the second election period, following the big municipal restructuring. Government has also cut funding to municipalities for recent years, so finances are a challenging issue for the political board. Therefore much detailed structuring and planning was needed at this level.

The quality reports are in general to a lesser extent a pretext for the school board to act in relation to the schools, even if board members score on average 4.1 on a scale from 0 to 6 and believe slightly more strongly than board chairs (score 3.9) that the quality reports do in fact lead to initiatives. That may be a sign that initiatives in relation to the schools are left with the superintendents. There is on the other hand broad *agreement about the valuable information content and clarity of the schools’ quality reports*.

#### *Comments on Type of Issues Delegated by Politicians*

The superintendents’ function can be seen as the implementers on the political boards’ behalf: it is the superintendent’s responsibility to see to it that political decisions are implemented at the operating level of the administration. Accordingly they function as a connection joint between the political level and the operative core of the municipal educational system, the schools themselves. It is thus their predominant role to have overall view of the administration and not be too involved with daily detail (which is the task of the school leaders). It does however seem important that school leaders can both handle the professional side of leading their schools and be able to cope with administrative and strategic tasks. The school leaders must be both managers and leaders of their schools. This can be seen as a recognition that



being effective in attaining the school's professional goals is no longer considered sufficient for a school leader. There is likewise a demand for the school leader to be efficient and streamline the school's organisation, so that it too can achieve economic efficiency.

## **8.4 *Relations Between Control and Autonomy in the Chain***

*Lead Paragraph* The superintendents see school leaders as having a rather direct connection with superintendents, and consequently *see* school leaders as having a rather large degree of autonomy. The board members believe that there are certain areas – in the development of the school – where they feel they have influence. On the other hand they feel that the state interferes too much in local matters, even if the school system is decentralised and the administration has sufficient competency. The school leaders feel moderately independent, but many think that others than themselves decide how they use their time.

### **8.4.1 Superintendents**

*Relations between superintendents and school leaders* are direct, as only 7 % said there was an intermediate level of leadership between themselves and school leaders. It is worth noting here that in other recent research projects (Moos and Kofod 2009), school leaders in the new, larger municipalities complained that the ongoing direct communication between school leaders and local administration or superintendent had been replaced by written communication. They complained that they seldom had the chance to meet with superintendents because, with so many institutions to look after, superintendents were occupied producing documents on policies and principles.

To the question '*Give examples of the two most important leadership groups in your work,*' superintendents answer that the most important tasks in those networks are: strategy and development, coordination and collaboration, followed by operations and development, sparring and exchange of experience and, at the bottom end, development of learning and teaching.

To the question '*Give examples of the two most important leadership groups in relation to your work,*' superintendents answer that they see these meetings as important, along with meetings in the administration with peers and superiors.

When replying to the question: '*How do you perceive the degree of your autonomy?*' 83 % of the superintendents replied in the two top categories, indicating that they feel they have plenty of room for manoeuvre.

### 8.4.2 Board Members and Chairs

Answers to questions about their influence reflect that there is a widespread feeling among municipal politicians that *the state interferes too much in the decentralised public school*. In recent years the state level has centralised a number of issues at the expense of the municipal levels' influence, particularly regarding centralised tests, comparisons between schools through published examination results, and numerous alterations to the law of the comprehensive school – 18 within 10 years. These issues suggest that there are tensions between the state and the municipal level regarding educational issues.

Both chairs and members of the school board estimate that the school administration has sufficient competency to lead the development of the schools and that the superintendent is competent in directing the school leaders' school development work.

The only *issue where there seems to be some dissatisfaction* is that answers point to the assessment that school leaders do not create good conditions for high-performing students (4.4 for chairs and 4.2 for members on the 0–6 points scale). This situation may reflect the tradition of a very egalitarian Danish school system, where traditionally there has been much more focus on students with special needs than on those who perform at a high level.

It seems that owing to the decentralisation of responsibility to schools that is typical for Danish municipalities, chairs and members of the school boards do not consider this issue part of their responsibility. The most common model of administration is the so-called company model, which is the preferred model in 78 % of the municipalities. In this model the school system is administratively run by a board of managers as the top administrative management, which conducts strategy, coordination and development. The responsibility for day-to-day business is delegated to the schools (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012).

The open-ended question *In which cases should the political board monitor the work of the superintendent?* gave the following picture. The number of statements within all categories are very, very close – for example, 26, 22, 21, 20, 18. The highest priority was given to *quality*: quality, evaluation and outcomes. Second priority was given to *implementation* of political decisions taken by the board itself. Third priority was *budget and economy*, while *school structure* and *school development* were fourth. This fourth category reflects the fact that many 'new' municipalities closed down schools or restructured some of them into department schools located in several premises at some distance from one another as a consequence of the municipal reform in 2007. Fifth priority was occupational *environment* for teachers and students.

### 8.4.3 School Leader

To the question '*How do you experience the school leader's degree of independence in the following situations?*' the school leaders answer: decisions concerning the inner organisation of school (61 %), those concerning educational work (54 %), and

the prioritising of my work (47 %). The most astonishing finding is perhaps that almost half of the school leaders do not feel they are able to decide on their own prioritising of their work. They seem to feel steered from the outside rather than self-steered. The general image is that Danish schools are very autonomous, and these answers seem to contradict that image.

When prioritising statements on *leadership influences on student learning*, school leaders pointed to their influence on staff. When it comes to their direct impact on the students' professional progress, the school leaders apparently think that the impact of the teachers is more important than their own direct impact. School leaders' influence in this field is seen as indirect, by way of teachers.

#### *Comments on the Relations Between Control and Autonomy in the Chain*

The Danish school system is quite decentralised, which means that there is a lot of autonomy in the system. It is a widespread impression that the various layers of the system are able to act quite independently of one another, even if both boards/chairs and school leaders think that others interfere too much in their field and thus limit their (as they see it) autonomy.

## **8.5 To Whom Is the Superintendent Loyal?**

*Lead Paragraph* The superintendents say that they are in charge of the educational system and therefore they are loyal to the administrative manager, and in some instances to the politicians on the school board. The board members and chiefs say that they are in a middle-manager position. That means that on the one side they are loyal to the politicians they represent, i.e. their loyalty is upwards, and on the other side they are loyal to the superintendents, with whom board chairs in particular frequently work closely. Most of the school leaders feel that their superior is the superintendent.

### **8.5.1 The Superintendents**

Most of the superintendents have as their field of responsibility a broad field of education comprising childcare, adult education, culture and social affairs, and they are subordinate to other managers and to various political committees. The reason why relations to the political level are diverse is that some municipalities were restructured into management concerns or groups, with fewer political committees, fewer top managers, and more middle managers.

This means that nine out of ten superintendents have an administrative manager between themselves and the political committee. This is because one of the aims of the municipal restructuring was to give more power of decision to directors or superintendents, meaning that the political/administrative wish was to have 'strong leaders' who were not captured by the traditions, identities and cultures of the field

they were managing, but could fulfil their task with the entire municipality in view, as well as cooperation between institutions and employees, so as to profit municipal residents.

It is a clear tendency that most of those employed in the higher-level management posts are not educators by profession. These positions are gradually being taken over by professionals with an economic or legal background (Olsen 2008). The tendency can be seen as a case of homogenising public leadership – adding more management powers, and subtracting professional educational expertise.

The superintendents were asked to *indicate their perception of their own influence*: (1) I can also influence decisions outside my field, education; (2) I see myself as part of the overarching municipal administration; (3) My main task is to lead development of the quality of education; (4) My main task is to defend my field; (5) I see myself more as the representative of the ministry of education. The answers to these questions clearly show that superintendents see themselves as members of the municipal administrative leadership, with prior loyalties to the municipal education and administration.

The superintendents' answers to the question: '*Who is it important to consult when you make your decisions?*' can be categorised into three priority layers:

- *High priority*: the city council, the committee chair, school leaders, the mayor's administration, parent boards.
- *Middle layer*: parents, teachers, consultants, students, deputy committee chair, and local professional associations.
- *Low priority*: citizens, local lobbyists, local trade, and religious groups.

The priorities are clear: council, chair, school leaders, administration and parent boards – all of whom are in leading positions – are at the top.

Taken together, the image of superintendents that can be constructed is that they see themselves as policymakers, concerned not only with implementation ('implementation-responsible'), but also with autonomy, the expectations of the political chair, and the agencies or agents they find it important to consult. Here can see an image of civil servants who see themselves as much as policymakers as civil servants. They are centrally positioned when it comes to laying the foundations of decision-making, implementing decisions, and connecting practices to decisions. This finding may be surprising, given that only 11 % of superintendents are directly responsible to the political committee.

### 8.5.2 Chairs and Members

It is a general impression that the *chairs and members find they are governing at a middle level in the municipality*, with professionals located at intermediate stages between themselves and actors in schools and other institutions. This is a matter of economy, structures and priorities. At the same time, board chairs and members also occupy themselves with the welfare or well-being of the people they govern.

Although board chairs and members place great emphasis on *the superintendent's monitoring of the school leaders' work*, they themselves emphasise ad hoc questions over strategic questions. One interpretation could be that board chairs and members believe it is not their duty to interfere with the superintendent's work. A third interesting issue is that 'leadership' is rated among the lowest of all issues. An explanation for this could be that chairs believe this issue is a natural part of the superintendent's prerogatives and that they therefore should not interfere. Another interpretation could be that a majority of chairs and members think that in general there are no problems concerning this issue.

#### *Comments on Loyalty*

It seems that the loyalty relations actually reflect the formal municipal school organisation. In other words, each layer in the school administration feels loyal to the next joint in the decision chain from their position.

## **8.6 Tendencies**

It is no great surprise that Danish superintendents are hard to pin down for face-to-face meetings, for they have been assigned multiple titles and remits in the new municipal constructions, moving from clear, steep hierarchies with fixed positions, tasks and relations to fluid networks with flexibility and mobility structures, positions, relations and tasks. Two reforms contributed to this development: the general drive towards efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector administration, and the structural reform since 2007. The municipalities were merged into larger units, with fewer institutions and more cross-area collaboration between educational institutions, daycare and leisure-time institutions, and cultural institutions. This was not only a consequence of the efficiency drive, but at the same time a trigger for intensifying the efficiency drive within municipalities. One effect of this tendency has been that superintendents are now more likely to be recruited from the field of general management than education.

The general governance structure is being transformed along New Public Management lines. Former chains of responsibility and governance from state to municipality to schools are being broken in the construction of a semi-autonomous sector governed through a number of mechanisms. Among these, 'management by objective' is an important feature; dividing administrations into principal units, producer units and consumer units (as in the Concern, Enterprise and Workplace model) with managerial relations is another; and transforming bureaucratic hierarchies to fluid networks is yet another. Following these trends there is also the tendency to replace human relations and communication with social technologies, for instance measuring by numbers. This tendency however has not completely penetrated the whole field of educational governance, because some of the technologies are governmental technologies intended to make the receiver take over full responsibility for his/her actions – the self-governance model that can be seen in governance

networks. This image is fluffy, because there are very many different structures and cultures in the field of municipal governance and management.

Superintendents are pulled or knit into various kinds of networks with superiors in the municipal administration, with politicians in the school board, with school leaders, and with peers. Superintendents tend to rate networks with institutional leaders as the most important. It is in these same networks with institutional leaders that they seem also to perform a major part of their tasks: to broker, bridge, mediate or translate political and administrative decisions to schools and institutions, and to ensure that these are accepted. As translation comprises its own interpretation and thus colours the message, superintendents have an important influence on school development and operation.

Many superintendents have experienced that they are now a rung lower on the ladder of the municipal hierarchy than previously by virtue of being subordinate to the director of section. They claim nevertheless to have influence on the school boards' political decisions, because they often write the agenda for the meetings and the background papers, and they provide professional information within the field to the board. These roles give them leeway for some level of interpretation, and thus influence.

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