West Fargo Public Schools Superintendent Succession Plan

Board policy (Operational Expectation Policy #2) requires that the superintendent provides a succession plan. It states, *"The Superintendent shall designate at least one other executive staff member who is familiar with the Board's governance process and issues of current concern and is capable of assuming Superintendent responsibilities on an emergency basis. Further, the Superintendent shall develop and provide for the Board a recommended succession plan in the event of the Superintendent's vacating the position."*

Framework for Superintendent Succession Planning

For key leadership positions the plan involves: 1) Emergency succession plan and transferring leadership; 2) non-emergency succession.

1) ***Emergency succession plans and transferring leadership*** is addressed for the superintendent level through OE-2, noted above. The executive team functions collaboratively to make many decisions that fall to the superintendent. With a team approach, the role is more accurately termed "the superintendency." All core team administrators are familiar with and have participated in training in the board's governance model. All members of the executive leadership team are kept "up to speed" regarding district operations and one another's areas of responsibility through weekly meetings of the team. Nevertheless, ultimate authority does reside in one person if the team cannot agree, or in decisions in which there is no time to engage in a team process. Following is the succession/chain of leadership by position for the current school year, provided position incumbents remain the same. People who are included in the succession sequence are/must be licensed district administrators:
    a. Superintendent— Ms. Beth Slette
    b. Assistant Superintendent—Dr. Rachael Agre
    c. Assistant Superintendent— Dr. Rob Lech
    d. Community High School Principal—Dr. Tom Gravel
    e. Horace High School Principal— Dr. Pam Cronin

The plan must envision cases in which the superintendent might die, be called away for an extended period for family emergencies, become incapacitated or unavailable through illness.

2) Non-emergency succession
An additional circumstance might also be the departure of the superintendent through retirement or employment elsewhere, and the board's inability to secure a person with the right characteristics and skills in a timely manner. In such cases, depending on the duration of time that an alternative must be in place, the board may want or need to consider alternatives to this plan, depending upon the people in the positions named above. It is increasingly common for boards to utilize a person in the chain above, or even an outside person, in the capacity of *interim superintendent.* There are of course advantages and disadvantages to internal versus external interim superintendents as

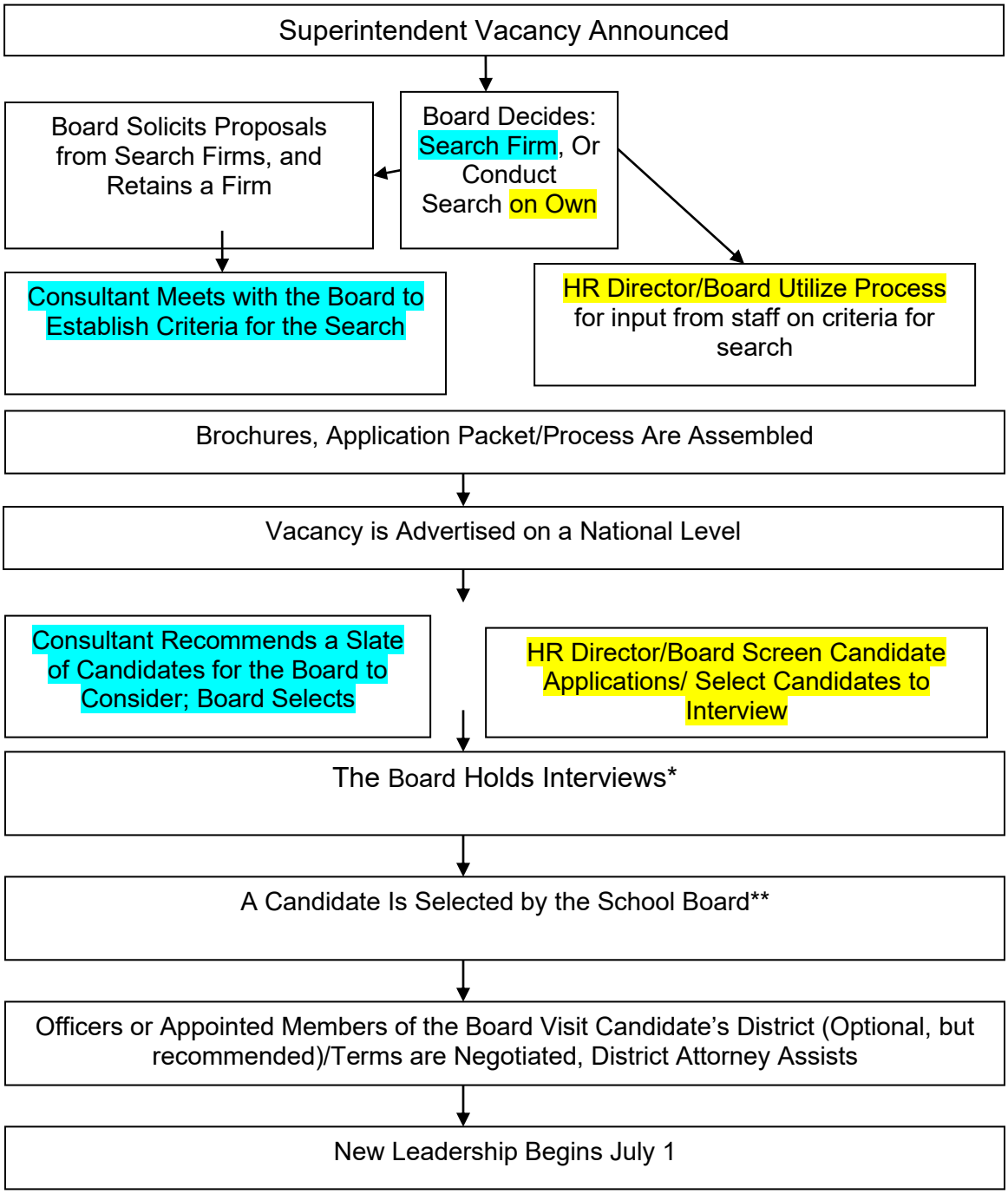
outlined in the following chart. In many instances the decision of whether to hire an interim has to do with the timing of the superintendent's departure and the relation of that timing to the normal "hiring season."

	Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Internal Interim	• Knows the system, • Can continue the current direction with less disruption, if that direction remains desirable or acceptable to the board, • If the internal interim has applied or wants to apply for the position, the interim time gives him/her a chance to "try it on for size" and for the board to evaluate his/her performance, • Would likely not cost as much as the new permanent person, or the additional cost of an outside person.	• Depending on the position held by the interim, may be somewhat disruptive (may have to hire or promote behind the interim to accomplish their prior responsibility or portions thereof), • If the internal interim wants the job, but then is not given it at the end of the interim period, there might be an awkwardness among the board, the staff he/she has supervised and the interim, should he/she remain in the district, • It would be customary to provide additional compensation and/or benefits for the interim period; both board and the interim would need to be prepared for this to be adjusted at the end of the interim period, • May be more difficult for an internal interim to make major changes in direction during the interim year, if that is what the board desires.
External Interim	• Competent people are available to do interim jobs, particularly if the goal is to "keep the lid on" and maintain the status quo, • If one or two major, controversial changes are desired by the board, sometimes an external person can be tasked to accomplish such changes without the long-term fallout that would accrue to a new "permanent" superintendent given such expectations. • Does not require major adjustments in existing executive level staff—they continue to do their jobs and support the interim • Usually would not cost as much as the new permanent person	• It would take time to learn the system and get up to speed, • Would likely not be able, nor would it be wise to expect, to lead or facilitate any new strategic direction or initiative—usually these are left to the new superintendent/board team.

Transfer of leadership to new leadership at the superintendent level can occur under a variety of scenarios. If the transition is to a person already on staff, the process can be more prolonged and systematic. If the in-coming leader is from outside the district, then the transition will be different. It can occur through one-on-one conversations between exiting administration and the in-coming administrator. A short transition period, or a limited number of transition activities/meetings are best. The focus should be on the in-coming administrator receiving information and procedural orientations, not opinions or biases regarding staff or future directions. Once these activities are accomplished, the exiting administrator should *leave* the position as quickly as possible to allow the incoming person an opportunity to establish a leadership system and assert his/her own style. Even if the exiting administrator remains in the community or the system in some capacity, they should err on the side of distancing themselves in terms of both presence, and all means of communication and should avoid any appearance of continuing influence.

In most instances the superintendent will announce his/her retirement; that he/she has taken another position; or the board will ask the superintendent to leave/not renew the contract. All these scenarios will create the possibility either of filling the position on a short-term using an interim (see above), or in a normal search process. For a district of West Fargo's size, it will likely be required or advisable to conduct a regional or national search. The following graphic outlines the general steps in the superintendent search process.

General Steps in a Superintendent Search Process



*It is advisable to engage ad hoc advisory committees of staff and community in addition to the board.
**If the board does not find a candidate who matches criteria and expectations, then conducting this process again, or appointing an interim, may be appropriate.