



District Leadership Organizational Design

_____ School District
February 27, 2026

Rethink Possible.

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Executive Summary

The ____ School District partnered with CESO to conduct an organizational study focused on the primary goal of optimizing the district's leadership structure to better drive strategic initiatives and meet evolving operating expectations. This study was commissioned to ensure that the district's executive framework is intentionally designed to support a unified PreK-12 academic vision and a sustainable leadership pipeline.

Through a series of executive interviews and workflow reviews, CESO's analysis focused on identifying the structural alignment necessary to transition from reactive management to proactive strategic governance. To ensure a comprehensive perspective, CESO conducted individual interviews with every member of the executive leadership team. These conversations were designed to identify current barriers to success and to understand how the district's leadership capacity could be better leveraged to meet its goals. From these discussions, five primary themes emerged:

- Optimizing Executive Capacity for Strategic Governance
- Redefining Principal Support
- Ensuring Stability through Succession Planning
- Eliminating Functional Silos
- Establishing PreK-12 Systemic Coherence

While this report outlines a structural path forward, CESO's analysis is grounded in a core CESO belief: leadership impact is greatest when it is closest to the student. Principals are the primary drivers of student success, and their effectiveness is a direct reflection of the support they receive from the district office. A structure is only as strong as its ability to empower building leaders and clear the path for instructional excellence.

It is important to note that a structural chart is a map, not a destination. The success of the ____ will depend not only on where the boxes are placed, but on the effectiveness and accountability of those within the roles. Structural change must be paired with intentional performance management to ensure the district is operating with the highest possible leadership vitality.

CESO recognizes that this study concludes during a significant fiscal challenge for the district. However, the current budget climate makes this structural transition a vital factor in the district's long-term health. To navigate a large deficit, the district requires a leadership framework that is specifically designed to eliminate operational leakage and ensure every role is performing at its highest productivity.

While this study focused on the executive leadership team, CESO's findings suggest that a broader organizational assessment of the entire district office is a necessary next step. To

effectively navigate the current fiscal climate, the district must ensure that every department, including Finance, HR, and Operations, is operating at its highest level of productivity. A systematic review of workflows and departmental alignment would allow the district to be proactive rather than reactive, identifying the efficiencies needed to provide long-term stability and avoid recurring budget crises.

Methodology

To develop a clear understanding of the district's leadership needs, CESO conducted a targeted review of the executive structure and its impact on district-level decision-making. This approach was designed to identify why the current framework may be hindering strategic progress and to identify where structural shifts could better serve the district's goals.

Document and Structural Review

CESO conducted a thorough analysis of the current organizational hierarchy, reporting lines, and existing job descriptions for the Superintendent and all Executive Directors. This review focused on identifying where roles may have expanded beyond their original intent and where structural overlaps could be creating administrative friction.

Individual Interviews

CESO conducted interviews with the following individuals as part of the district office organizational design study to understand their roles and develop recommendations to improve district operations:

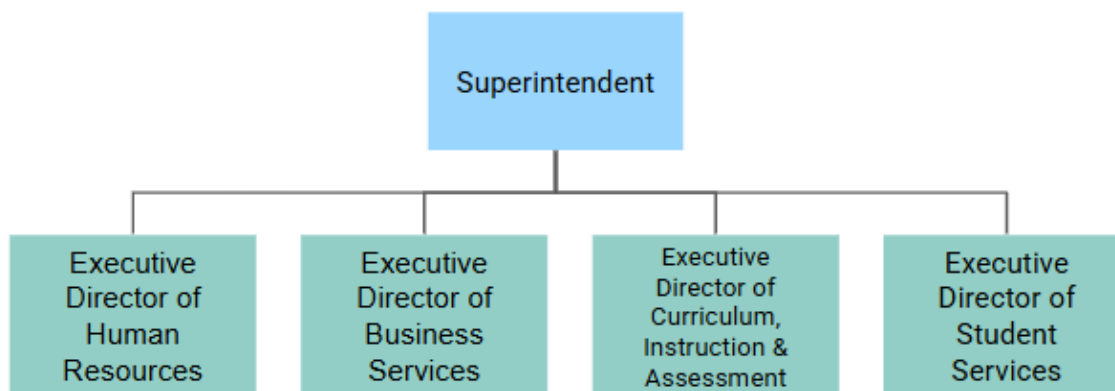
- Mike Johnson, Superintendent
- Dr. Mark Elworthy, Executive Director of Business Services
- Michele Golden, Executive Director of Human Resources
- Dr. Kaying Xiong, Executive Director of Student Services & Special Education
- Mandy VanVleet, Executive Director of Teaching & Learning
- Brandon Wick, Human Resources Manager

These conversations were designed to identify systemic barriers, evaluate the balance between tactical and strategic responsibilities, and determine how the central office can better support building-level leadership.

Key Findings

Current Executive Level Structure

The current framework for _____ places all executive functions, including both Operations and Academic Leadership, directly under the Superintendent. While this structure centralizes authority, it also positions the Superintendent at the center of every strategic and operational decision. This creates a bottleneck where the highest level of leadership is frequently occupied with department-level tasks, leaving little room for long-term fiscal and strategic governance.



Primary Themes and Organizational Barriers

The following five themes emerged consistently throughout executive interviews. These areas represent the primary barriers to district leadership's capacity to support the district's strategic initiatives and meet evolving operating expectations.

Theme 1: Optimizing Executive Capacity for Strategic Governance

The Superintendent provides a strong service-oriented leadership presence; however, current structures and expectations frequently pull him into daily operational matters. As a result, limited capacity remains for system-level priorities such as Board development, community engagement, and strategic planning. Clarifying roles and strengthening administrative support could help rebalance these responsibilities.

Theme 2: Redefining Principal Support: Distinguishing Supervision from Coaching

Current structures provide oversight for principal evaluation; however, there is a notable absence of consistent administrative mentorship and day-to-day coaching. Principals are managing a wide scope of responsibilities and, at times, seek support outside established supervision lines, reflecting unclear guidance and support structures. Strengthening ongoing mentorship and coaching would better support principal growth and leadership capacity.

Theme 3: Ensuring Organizational Stability through Strategic Succession

Staffing decisions are currently made in response to immediate vacancies, with limited emphasis on long-term succession planning. With an estimated 25% of administrative leadership, including key Executive Directors, nearing retirement within the next two years, the district would benefit from implementing a structured internal talent development and succession planning. Without a proactive succession plan, the district risks significant operational instability during these upcoming transitions.

Theme 4: Eliminating Functional Silos through Integrated Leadership

The current design reinforces silos that limit cross-department collaboration. On the operational side, greater alignment between Human Resources and Finance is needed to improve consistency in budget planning and position control. The recent challenges with the self-insurance rollout highlight the risks of fragmented benefits administration. When the financial and people-centered aspects of benefits are not fully integrated, it creates barriers to employee education and plan performance.

Similarly, on the academic side, there is a need for increased coordination between Student Services and Teaching and Learning. Currently, these departments often operate independently, which can lead to a siloed approach to student support. To provide integrated and effective instructional services, these two areas must move toward a more collaborative model. By breaking down these silos across both the business and academic houses, the district can ensure that its resources are managed with the oversight and precision required to serve students effectively.

Theme 5: Establishing PreK-12 Systemic Coherence

The district currently lacks a formal structural link between elementary and secondary programming. Without a dedicated role to support cross-level alignment, the PreK through 12 system risks failing to move forward as an integrated whole. This fragmentation often leads to inconsistent student outcomes and duplicated instructional efforts that the district cannot afford to maintain.

The Intersection of Structure and Productivity

While the five themes above identify structural gaps, CESO's analysis suggests that a change in the organizational chart is the initial step in a broader process of optimization. For a new structure to be successful, it must be supported by clearly defined roles that allow for individual and departmental accountability.

During CESO's review, it became apparent that the current lack of structural layers can make it difficult to establish and maintain consistent performance expectations. When roles are stretched across too many tactical and strategic areas, it is challenging for leadership to measure the true impact and productivity of each function. By refining these roles, the district

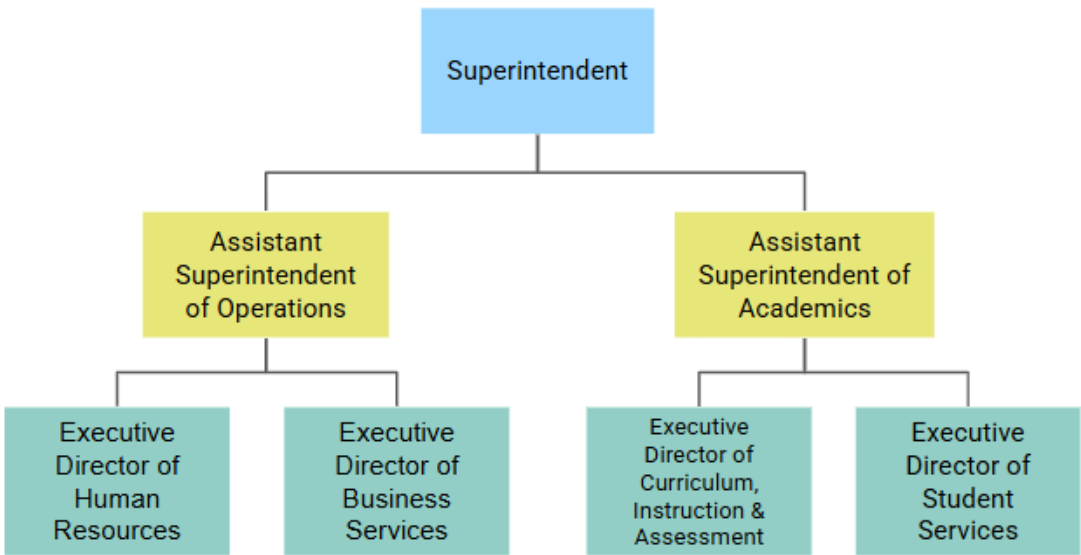
has the opportunity to create much higher levels of clarity. This ensures that every position is directly aligned with the strategic health and fiscal stability of the district, allowing the organization to operate with the efficiency required in the current budget climate.

Recommendations

To address the key findings of this study, CESO has developed two structural prototypes for _____ to consider. Both models are designed to clarify leadership roles and create a more effective bridge between the Superintendent and building-level leadership. These structures are specifically built to optimize the productivity of all leadership positions across the district. By refining this framework, the district can ensure that its administrative functions are intentionally organized to remove barriers, providing the consistent support needed to effectively drive the Strategic Plan and meet the Board’s Operating Expectations (OEs).

Prototype 1: The Integrated Dual-Assistant Superintendent Model

This model establishes two Assistant Superintendent roles to provide the Superintendent with comprehensive relief from day-to-day operational demands. This positions the Superintendent to focus almost exclusively on governance, system-level priorities, and long-term strategic leadership.



Changes included in the structure are further described below.

Assistant Superintendent of Academics: This role establishes a unified instructional leadership structure by bringing Teaching and Learning, Student Services, Special Education, and

Technology under a single area of oversight. This alignment reduces fragmentation across instructional departments, particularly addressing the current separation between special education and teaching and learning.

The primary value of this position is the dedicated supervision, evaluation, and mentorship it provides for building principals. Principals are the vital link to student achievement, yet they are often required to navigate complex operational and instructional demands without a consistent executive partner. This Assistant Superintendent serves as that partner, providing the coaching and accountability necessary to optimize principal productivity. By elevating the support provided to building leaders, the district ensures that principals can focus their energy on instructional leadership and school culture. When principals are empowered and well-supported, the impact is felt directly in the classroom through improved academic outcomes for all students.

Assistant Superintendent of Operations: This role establishes a unified operational leadership structure with oversight of Human Resources, Finance, Facilities, and Food Service. By providing a dedicated point of leadership for these functions, the district ensures that all business operations are moving in a single, strategic direction.

A central goal of this position is to manage the high-level alignment between departments, allowing Executive Directors to focus more deeply on the technical and tactical execution within their specific areas. In this model, the Assistant Superintendent assumes the primary responsibility for driving and monitoring the Board's Operating Expectations (OEs). This shift allows Executive Directors to focus on their respective departments, increasing their capacity to solve problems and improve service delivery. With the Assistant Superintendent managing the strategic compliance and high-level deliverables, the department heads are empowered to lead their teams with greater focus and effectiveness.

Rationale and Benefits

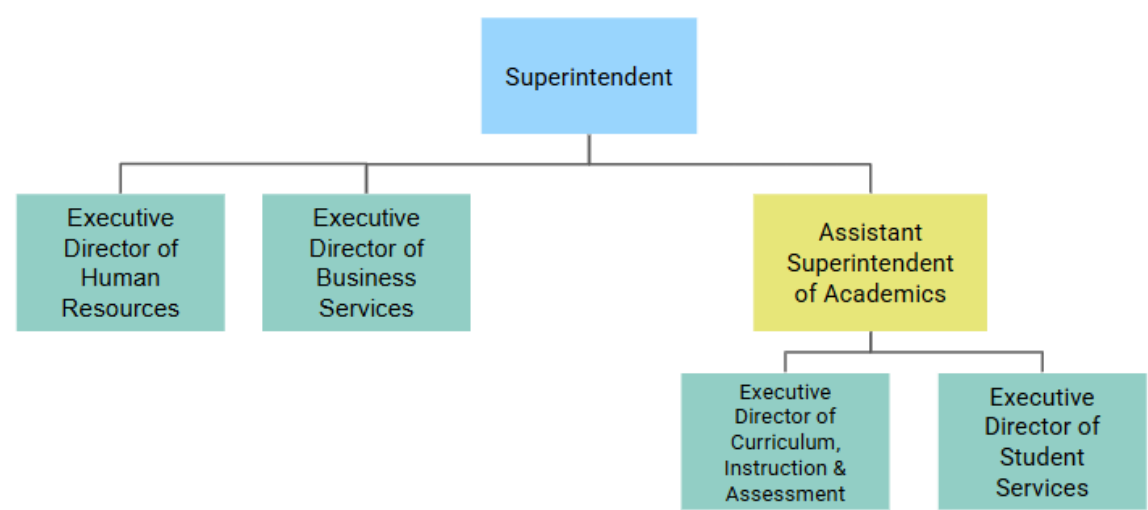
The primary benefit of this structure is the creation of a consistent decision-making framework that optimizes the productivity of the entire executive team. By providing dedicated leadership over both the academic and operational branches, the district ensures that every department is moving in a single, strategic direction. This model allows the Superintendent to transition from daily tactical management to a focus on high-level governance and the Board's Operating Expectations (OEs).

A critical advantage of this dual-assistant structure is the formal opportunity for succession planning. These positions serve as intentional training grounds for future district leadership, allowing high-potential internal candidates to gain the executive experience necessary to manage complex, system-wide initiatives from both an instructional and a business perspective. Whether an emerging leader is overseeing the integration of special education into the general curriculum or managing the alignment between Human Resources and Finance, they are building the capacity to eventually lead at the highest level. This focus on internal growth

ensures the district preserves its institutional knowledge and remains prepared for future leadership transitions with stability and long-term fidelity.

Prototype 2: The Instructional Focus Model

This model establishes a single Assistant Superintendent role focused exclusively on the district’s instructional core. This structure reflects the current Strategic Plan by prioritizing student learning and reinforcing system-wide alignment in support of student outcomes. With instructional leadership centralized at the Assistant Superintendent level, the Superintendent is better positioned to maintain a strategic, governance-focused role.



Changes included in the structure are further described below.

Assistant Superintendent of Academics: This role consolidates Teaching and Learning, Student Services, and Technology under a single area of oversight. The primary focus of this position is to close performance gaps by directing executive leadership toward student achievement and educational equity.

As in the first model, the primary value of this position is the dedicated supervision, evaluation, and mentorship it provides for building principals. By serving as a consistent executive partner, this role provides the coaching necessary to develop high-performing leaders. This creates a clear pathway for succession planning, where strong principal support ensures that high-performing school leaders develop the skills and confidence needed to eventually advance into executive roles or the superintendency.

Operational Structure: In this model, operational departments including Finance, Human Resources, Food Services, and Facilities would generally retain their current reporting lines to the Superintendent. This ensures the Superintendent remains connected to the fiscal health of the district while the Assistant Superintendent of Academics drives the instructional mission. While

this option prioritizes academic alignment, existing leaders at the director level are expected to assume greater responsibility for the day-to-day monitoring of Operating Expectations (OEs) within their respective areas. This model provides a targeted investment in the instructional core while maintaining a leaner executive team.

Recommendation for a Comprehensive District Office Study

To build upon the executive-level shifts outlined in this study, CESO recommends that the district commission a comprehensive operations assessment of the entire district office. It is important to note that the current evaluation focused specifically on the leadership structure at the executive director level and above. While these structural changes provide the necessary foundation for stability, a department-level assessment is required to evaluate the workflows and staffing models within each functional area.

This district-wide assessment would allow the organization to identify specific opportunities for improved efficiency and effectiveness. By analyzing how each department delivers services, the district can eliminate redundant processes and ensure that every role is optimized to support the instructional mission. In combination with the proposed executive prototypes, this departmental study will provide a complete roadmap for a structure that is both fiscally sustainable and operationally high-performing. This proactive approach ensures that the district office is not only organized correctly at the top but is also operating with the precision required to manage long-term budget health.

Consideration for Functional Alignment

During CESO's evaluation, CESO identified specific opportunities where the district might further align internal functions to improve both fiscal oversight and employee support. Given the current budget deficit and the high stakes of the self-insurance plan, the coordination between Finance and Human Resources is more critical than ever.

One area for consideration is the transition of benefits administration from Finance to Human Resources. In many high-performing organizations, housing benefits within HR allows for a more people-centered approach to employee education and plan navigation. This shift could be a vital step in improving the performance of the self-insurance model by ensuring that employees are better informed and supported in their healthcare choices.

Furthermore, a closer alignment between these two departments is essential for strengthening position control. Effective position control ensures that every staffing decision is tied directly to the budget, preventing the gradual increase in staffing costs that often contributes to long-term fiscal challenges. Because these changes involve complex shifts in reporting and workload, CESO believes this should be a focus of a comprehensive district office assessment. This study would provide the necessary data to ensure that any realignment optimizes the productivity of both departments and supports the overall financial health of the district.

Conclusion

The recommendations outlined in this report provide the ____ School District with a strategic framework to transition from a legacy structure of operational reactivity to one of Coherent Governance. By moving away from a model where leadership is frequently pulled into daily tactical troubleshooting, the district can establish a proactive environment where the Superintendent and the Board can focus on system-level oversight and long-term strategic health.

This evolution toward a more intentional structure of Coherent Governance offers the district three distinct advantages:

1. **Leadership Vitality:** By providing building principals with dedicated mentorship and consistent executive partnership, the district ensures that its most influential leaders have the support necessary to drive student achievement. When leadership is clear and well-supported, it creates a culture of high performance that reaches every classroom.
2. **Fiscal Stewardship and Human Productivity:** In the current budget climate, the district must ensure that its human capital is operating at the highest possible level of productivity. This structure provides the necessary oversight to measure and manage that productivity, ensuring that every role is aligned with the district's goals. By eliminating operational leakage and establishing clear accountability, the district can better navigate current deficits and prevent recurring budget crises in the future.
3. **Organizational Stability:** By establishing a formal leadership pipeline through these Assistant Superintendent roles, the district preserves its institutional knowledge. This ensures that ____ remains prepared for future leadership transitions with stability, long-term fidelity, and a ready pipeline of proven internal talent.

As the Board and administration consider these prototypes, it is important to remember that organizational design is the foundation of accountability. By committing to this structural evolution, the district is positioning itself to navigate its fiscal challenges while building a more coherent, stable, and effective system for the students and families it serves.

CESO remains a committed partner in this work, ready to support the district through the implementation of these changes and the broader assessment of the district office operations.