Chapter 4
Norwegian Superintendents Are Mediators in the Governance Chain

Jan Merok Paulsen and Hans Christian Høyer

Abstract Transnational bodies such as OECD have had great influence in the national educational debate in Norway since the first PISA study was made public in 2001. A range of social technologies, such as participation in international rank-based tests, national standardized tests and various teacher and student surveys, have been implemented stepwise in order to more tightly monitor the work of schoolteachers. These trends have been institutionalized towards a consistent regulative system by means of two structural elements. The national quality assurance system was established in 2005 to tighten the links between national policies and classroom practice. The semi-independent National Directorate of Education and Training was established and radically up-scaled (in terms of staffing) at the same time, to lead reform initiatives for municipalities and schools and to manage the national quality system. This also put superintendents in a normative and cultural crossfire between the longstanding norms of the teaching profession and traditional policy cultures in education, on one hand, and the reform agendas and the instruments influenced by the OECD, on the other. The results of surveys of superintendents, school board members and school leaders illustrate aspects of the new situation for superintendents in the midst of governance chains and networks. The main inference taken from the data is that superintendents have to operate multiple arenas within and beyond the municipality organization, which puts them in a crossfire of conflicting expectations and demands.

Keywords De-politicalization • School strategy • Mediation • Leadership expectations

J.M. Paulsen (✉)
Faculty of Teacher Education and International Studies, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Science, Oslo, Norway
e-mail: Jan-Merok.Paulsen@hioa.no

H.C. Høyer
Faculty of Business Administration, Hedmark University College, Elverum, Norway
e-mail: hans.hoyer@hihm.no

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1 Trans-national and National Developments and Trends

Since the first PISA study in 2001 placed Norway just at the mean of the participating OECD countries (Kjærnsli 2007; Kjærnsli et al. 2004) – a position in the OECD's ranking system that has been perceived as mediocre at best – the media and politicians have put their primary focus on how to raise student achievement in basic subjects such as literacy, mathematics and science. Notably, educational researchers have been concerned by the significant amount of within-class and within-school variation in student learning that has been consistently demonstrated by the PISA studies– a pattern that was also visible in earlier evaluations of Norwegian primary education (Haug and Bachmann 2007; Nordahl 2010). Alongside the shift in media exposure and educational policy agenda towards performance indicators, a stable but low completion rate for upper secondary education, in which more than one out of four students drops out of school, has also been consistently demonstrated. Specifically, within vocational training the dropout-rate at a national level has varied from 35 to 40 % of a cohort (Markussen et al. 2011). The mass, scale and range of educational performance indicators targeting primary and secondary education in Norway has changed the educational policy debate significantly during the last decade, towards an emphasis on spotlighting numbers and rank positions in national and international competitions (Sjøberg 2014). This major shift in the educational debate in Norway should in theory join superintendents, local school politicians and school leaders together in a different manner than before the "PISA shock" in 2001, due to the accountability and quality assurance discourse. As a function of the changes in the structural forms of school governance, new network relationships between superintendents, school leaders and local politicians can be formed, and other relationships can be altered.

1.1 Numbers and Performance Indicators Instead of Political Decisions

Against the backdrop of the mediocre rankings in the PISA studies undertaken in 2000 and 2003, the Norwegian government launched a curriculum reform in 2006 known as the "Knowledge Promotion" (K-06), and the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training was established in the same year in order to strengthen the state's grip on the implementation process. This semi-independent state directorate has been responsible for managing the bulk of the standardized measurement instruments such as national achievement tests, student assessment surveys and teacher assessment surveys, as well as centralized designed training programs for teachers and school leaders. In a similar vein, the National Quality Assurance System (NQAS) was launched in 2005 in order to improve the national standard of student achievement, and one of the mandatory procedures is an annual quality report by each of the 428 municipalities[1] (Skedsmo 2009).

[1] Norwegian term: Tilstandsrapport.

The quality report provides the national authorities with a control instrument to ensure that the municipalities are acting with a minimum of engagement in school matters. The quality report (which follows a national template in content) was also conducted in order to mobilize local politicians, school principals and professionals in school improvement issues (Johansson et al. 2013). These measures increase the focus on educational outcomes in terms of student performance in achievement tests, indicating new modes of school governing (Helgøy and Homme 2006). An important element related to the increased focus on evaluation and measurement is the need to make key actors such as superintendents, principals and teachers accountable. In this context, accountability often means when an actor, by virtue of contractual obligations, has the right to hold another actor responsible to a set of standards, to judge whether the standards have been met, and to intervene or impose sanctions if the standards are deemed unfulfilled (Johansson et al. 2013). Compared to the inspection-driven systems found in many other Western democracies, this approach does not imply direct control of educational quality in terms of teaching and learning in schools. The state supervision follows a system revision approach and aims to expose cases where legal regulations are not followed (Sivesind 2009). So far, state supervision has focused on areas such as the right to special education and adapted teaching, to secure a safe school environment and the extent to which the municipalities have established a system for quality assurance (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014).

Although Norway has not implemented a national inspection system as in Sweden and other western democracies, the bulk of policy tools implemented by the government round 2005 can uniformly be seen as a wave of centralization in school governance. As in many other European countries, however, Norwegian policy-makers have been heavily influenced by the OECD PISA studies which have become the epicenter of educational policy (Meyer and Benavot 2013), and Norwegian policy-makers have thus adapted these comparative measures as the overall "benchmark" of educational quality in Norwegian compulsory education. For example, when the PISA measures in 2012 exposed a decline in math and science for 15 year old Norwegian students (OECD 2013), a series of policy initiatives was launched in order to solve the "national math problem".

1.2 From Political towards Market-Driven Steering of Schools?

The traditional model of administrative and political governing in the Norwegian public sector is labeled by Johan P. Olsen 'the sovereign rationality-bounded state model' (Olsen 1978, 1988), meaning that there is a centralized state with a large public sector in which standardization and equality are prominent values. This model has been established as a norm of political and administrative governance in Norway for a long time, emphasizing the collective and integrative features of the political-administrative system and the role of the citizen (March and Olsen 1989). According to this state model, change and reform processes are hierarchical and

dominated by political and administrative leaders, implying that processes are closed and involve an exclusive group of participants (Christensen and Lægreid 2001c). Executive power is based on political bodies, and the executive has at its disposal a neutral civil service with a wealth of professional expertise, which prepares and implements policies, however, the traditional model has been supplemented by a variety of others.

Olsen (1988) calls one alternative model of political-administrative control "the supermarket state", or "fragmented state" model (Tranøy and Østerud 2001). This model presumes that the government and the state in general have a service-providing role, with an emphasis on efficiency and quality. People are mainly seen as consumers or clients, and the hierarchy, in one sense, is turned "upside down". Public administration is thus increasingly seen as a service-provider, a holding company for citizens, redefined as clients or consumers. In the market-oriented ideal model of NPM (Hood 1991), rather than the state controlling society on the basis of a democratic mandate, society controls the state directly through market mechanisms. Public reform processes are primarily a result of changes in markets and user demand, and hence partly environmental-deterministic in nature.

The power and capacity to make collective decisions is spread among a variety of actors in complex networks. With its emphasis on employability and the many intersections between political and economic actors, a slight shift towards Ove K. Pedersen's notion of "the competitive state model" (Pedersen 2011), has been observable – however *not* entirely and not dramatically in terms of the pace and scope of implemented changes. Rather Norway has been characterized as a "slow learner" (Olsen and Peters 1996) and reluctant implementer (Christensen et al. 2000) of NPM ideas into practice, which must be seen against the backdrop of the solid state funding. Norway is evidently affected by transnational policy trends, while at the same time norms of decentralism and local democracy are still observable in this policy field (Møller and Skedsmo 2013). Municipalities, schools, teachers and pupils are subjected to external evaluation and assessment. Furthermore, accountability is strengthened through the results of national tests and evaluations available on special websites, paired with the formation of central control agencies, where the streams of reports, assessments and performance data are assembled (Koritzinsky 2001).

1.3 De-Political School Strategy in Content and Resources

There has been recent discussion of whether or not, or to what extent, political party conflicts play a role in educational decision-making processes in the municipalities (Nihlfors et al. 2014). Research suggests that internal party conflicts in the municipalities only play a modest role in the decision-making process, despite the fact that political distribution in the municipal councils is fairly convergent with the situation in parliament. A pattern of tension in educational politics between the state and the municipalities is visible in Norway, as in the other Nordic countries, and most

typically manifest in local perceptions of state interference in local school matters embedded in an asymmetric power relationship that the municipality members do not find entirely satisfying (Kofod et al. 2014).

As Anne Homme (2008) showed in her study of municipal school ownership in Norway, a series of school specialism issues have been transferred from the school board's domain to the municipal school administration over the last two decades. We see this pattern as a consistent trend of "bureaucratization" and "professionalization" in local school politics, however, this pattern does not necessarily mean that the school board's agenda is empty, but that the number of issues and processes that the school board takes up is fewer than before. More importantly, the issues Anne Homme considered in her study of Norwegian school boards were typically strategic ones, with implications for entire municipalities and beyond the school sector (Homme 2008). In a similar vein, as Homme (2008) observed, when local school issues appeared on the municipality's policy agenda, these issues (and the policy process they were part of) were typically assimilated into a broader field populated by multiple players: leadership and boards of multiple institutions (such as child care and culture), the municipality's top manager (CEO), the mayor, the central administration, the dominant political coalition, and external stakeholders. In these cases, the school board loses its exclusive ownership of local school policy and governance (Paulsen and Strand 2014).

1.4 Changing the Purpose of Schooling and Social Technologies

Over the last 15 years in Norway there has also been a shift from traditional government structures towards a more complex school governance model, known as 'soft governance', one that emphasizes indirect steering through the use of educational outcomes through standardized performance indicators in national and international rankings (Moos 2009). Performance indicators have also been coupled to more definable juridical rights that can be monitored by state supervision, and in the final event also brought to trial (Sivesind 2009; Sivesind and Bachmann 2008). The extensive use of performance indicators represents a policy shift characterized by the use of social technologies. The institutionalized pattern of state supervision, where municipalities are targeted for monitoring linked to school results on a broad basis, represents a regulatory and normative basis for the enhanced control of municipal school administrators, local politicians and school professionals.

The use of social technologies represents de-politicalization, as noted: "The international comparisons like the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), TIMSS and PISA have made huge impacts on political decisions and on educational practice. The ranking of educational systems has made it 'natural' that everybody takes the basis for the ranking for granted and tries to perform according to the tests and comparisons" (Moos 2009, p. 410). This shift, as noted by many scholars, can be seen as a case of cultural-cognitive change in the public school institution in Norway. Although the Norwegian quality assurance system, with its

extensive use of social technologies, is regarded as "softer" than the British and Swedish state inspection systems, it evidently represents a case of institutional pressures towards using numbers and indicators as the dominant criteria of the purpose of schooling. This briefly described trend can be seen in the owner policy documents of Norwegian schools, where performance indicators and standard-based pedagogy are used as "benchmarks" for professional schooling methods. This potentially creates tension between school politicians and school superintendents, and between superintendents and school principals.

1.5 Policy Cultures in Norwegian Education

Scandinavian reform research has demonstrated that when transnational policies and international reform trends meet the national context, they are filtered through national policy cultures (Christensen and Lægreid 2001a, b, c). On a general basis, the central dimensions of a policy culture in education are the values of openness, decentralism, rationalism, egalitarianism (equity), efficiency, quality and choice (Louis and Van Velzen 2012). The dominant values in Norway have traditionally been equality and equity in terms of inclusive schooling (Telhaug et al. 2004, 2006), paired with a substantial level of decentralism, in terms of local autonomy for municipalities to counterbalance the state's power (Bukve and Hagen 1994; Karlsen 1993). These values form important parts of the cultural-cognitive pillar of the Norwegian school institution, which also significantly influences the normative set-up (Lauglo 1990). The latter theoretical point means that policy cultures also influence the normative basis of, for example, what is to be taught in teacher education and the professional training of school leaders and teachers. Free choice and rationalism are either absent or minor cultural elements in Norway. Evidently, the strong wave of quality standardization, in terms of PISA results, national tests, standardized student surveys, teacher surveys and so forth, has shifted focus towards measurable quality in the national discourse, and challenged the basic features of the traditional school institution. It might thus enhance tensions at the local level between school principals and superintendents, and also create a climate of mistrust between school politicians at the local level and principals, simply because the standardization waves represent incompatible demands when they meet the normative and ideological basis for local schooling (e.g., Nihlfors and Johansson 2013).

2 Municipalities, Their Composition and Relationship with the State Level

Due to the great variation in municipality size and the scattered population pattern, the Norwegian welfare state model is, per se, embedded in a decentralized structure. The 428 Norwegian municipalities range in size from Oslo, with 634,433

inhabitants to Utsira with 211.[2] Half the municipalities have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, and only 12 have more than 50,000 inhabitants. Between 2004 and 2014 there was a clear tendency that municipalities with 40,000 inhabitants or more enjoyed success in increasing their populations, whereas the opposite trend was the case in the smallest rural municipalities. As a function of the diversity in the municipal landscape, a large number of Norwegian municipalities do not have a school board. Instead school matters are dealt with by the municipal council, and many superintendents have only a small number of schools under their authority. Contrary to current development in Finland and the municipality structure in Denmark, the Norwegian municipality structure has been more or less stable since the mid-1960s. The current conservative government, which took office in late 2013, however, has launched a municipality reform with the purpose of merging municipalities. The implementation strategy is being conducted in two steps. In the first phase, municipalities are expected to search and find their merging partners on a voluntary basis – for obvious reasons most typically in the neighborhood – in order to scale up the number of inhabitants served by the municipality.[3] In the second phase, the government has explicitly launched a national merging agenda, where parliament decides the merging process. The ideal size of a municipality, will be as a unit of service-delivery for least 30,000 inhabitants, which in practical terms will reduce the number of municipalities to approximately 100.

3 Structures Within Municipalities and Its Effects

3.1 Levels of Governance

After the millennium shift, a series of organizational reforms were launched, directed at the administrative design of Norwegian municipalities. A common theme in these redesign efforts was to deflate the administrative structure towards a so-called "two-level model" where schools, daycare institutions and elderly care institutions became more self-managed. The purpose was to establish a more lean and cost-efficient model, with only one level, within the civil service administration. In parallel, significant authorities and responsibilities were delegated directly to the school principal. In this re-organization wave, traditional sector administration was reduced and even dismantled. Reorganization initiatives were typically combined with the introduction of contract management and financial incentives towards service units, paired with leadership and management models found in the corporate sector (Christensen and Lægreid 2001a; Pedersen 2009). In 2004, 40.7 % of Norwegian municipalities reported that they had implemented a two-layer structure

[2] Pr. 1. January 2014. Source: Statistic Norway. Download: http://www.ssb.no/190435/folkemengd-og-areal-etter-kommune-sa-57.

[3] See the white paper on the municipality reform: http://www.regjeringen.no/pages/38649362/Meldingsdel_kommunereform_og_vedlegg.pdf.

in their administrative organization (Hovik and Stigen 2004). Several Norwegian municipalities removed their central school office, and also the superintendent position, in combination with the decentralization of formal authorities to the school principals. This organizational deflating trend in Norwegian municipalities emerged partly from local initiatives, however, it can also be interpreted as part of an international "pandemic" diffusion of reform ideas (T. H. Pedersen 2009). Most reform initiatives involving administrative and political design culminated round 2005, however (Hovik and Stigen 2008). A major reason for this development of "reversal" was the implementation of the K06 systemic reform. Powers and authorities were decentralized from the state to the Norwegian municipalities with the purpose of steering schools more effectively and to pursue implementation of the curriculum standards. The municipalities were required to establish a system for quality assurance comprised of evaluating, documenting and following up the results of the schools. This situation calls for a municipal school office and administrative leader that can integrate and coordinate the tasks and responsibilities that the national quality system requires.

3.2 Restructuring Municipalities

Norwegian local government is based on a two-tier structure consisting of 428 municipalities and 19 counties, and both tiers have directly-elected councils and their own administration, although they have separate functions. The 19 counties are responsible for upper secondary education, academic schooling and vocational training, along with some responsibilities for industrial R&D and innovation at the regional level. The main objectives of the 428 primary municipalities are to provide their inhabitants with primary and lower secondary education, basic healthcare services, elderly care and technical infrastructure. Within the cultural and church sector, municipalities organize the provision of services in close collaboration with other stakeholders from the local civic community. About 40 % of the national budget goes to the municipalities, which in turn provide public services comprising compulsory education, health care and social services. In educational policy documents published after 2004, the municipalities are defined as "school owners" (Møller et al. 2009) Their main responsibilities within the area of education are adapting the national curriculum to local needs, managing in-service training for teachers and school leaders, and ensuring the quality of primary and lower secondary schooling within their area of jurisdiction.

In Norway, the municipalities act as a mediating level between the state and schools, which in theory means that that the state has delegated formal power, authority, and responsibility to the 428 municipalities to organize their school owner functions in accordance with their own priorities. The degree of freedom to decide political and administrative design in the municipalities was a function of the Local Government Act of 1992, inspired by a so-called "free commune" experiment in the late 1980s, where a number of municipalities were allowed to govern themselves

more in accordance with local priorities and decoupled from a range of state directives (Baldersheim and Ståhlberg 1994). Notably, Norwegian municipalities utilized this opportunity only to a small extent throughout the 1990s, yet around the turn of the millennium, a series of redesign initiatives took place, where the common trend was deflating the administrative hierarchy and dismantling political specialist committees such as the school boards (Pedersen 2009). In consequence, a large group of municipalities removed the superintendent position and the school board from their organizational chart, and delegated the power and authority to school principals in the early 2000s. Due to the obligations inherent in the national quality assurance system implemented from 2006, however, there was a "rediscovery" of both superintendents and school boards around 2010, but with significant variation in formal titles and areas of responsibility (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014; Paulsen and Strand 2014). At the micro-level, the schools are considered self-governing units that report to the municipalities and to the state, and they are led by a school principal. There is a trend for a single principal as the headteacher of more than one school, and on similar lines, for smaller municipalities to merge schools and day-care institutions under the management of the school principals. Taken together, and seen from the perspective of superintendents, school board members and school leaders, their roles and functions have been significantly altered due to change in the national governance system and waves of redesign in the municipalities.

3.3 Summary and Implications

As laid out in the sections above, a range of social technologies, such as extended participation in international rank-based tests through OECD, national standardized tests and various teacher and student surveys, was implemented in steps in order to monitor schoolteachers work more tightly, and to inspect the relationship between classroom processes and student achievements more closely. These trends have been institutionalized towards a consistent regulative system by means of two structural elements. The national quality assurance system was established in 2005 with the purpose of tightening the connections between national policies and classroom practices. The semi-independent National Directorate of Education and Training[4] was established and radically scaled up (in terms of staffing) at the same time, in order to lead reform initiatives for municipalities and schools and to manage the national quality system. More specifically, whereas inclusive schooling has been the most longstanding and dominant norm in the Norwegian compulsory school system for decades, there has been a visible shift towards quality of outcomes, measurable student achievement, as the benchmark for success and progression over the last decade.

[4] Norwegian term: Utdanningsdirektoratet (UDIR).

The Directorate, by means of control over a range of financial resources on which schools and municipalities depend, is in a unique position to exert ideological influence on schools. This form of ideological, or cultural-cognitive in W.R. Scott's terminology (Scott 1995), steering of schools is made possible by deciding what kind of school projects will be funded by the Directorate. The Directorate has also conducted a national school principal training program, and a range of training programs for teachers, that involve the use of social technologies and the national agenda obviously inspired by the OECD. Since the Directorate is in a position to control both the content (e.g., national curriculum of school principal training) and the funding of the programs, superintendents, principals and teachers naturally bow with some compliance to the ideological scripts on which these programs are built. Through this grip, the normative and cultural-cognitive steering of schools has been strengthened significantly since the turn of the millennium (Engeland and Langfeldt 2009).

This change also puts the superintendent in normative and cultural crossfire between the longstanding norms of the teacher profession and traditional policy cultures in education, on the one hand, and the reform agendas and the instruments in use derived from the OECD influence, on the other. The superintendent will also continuously be the target of a national control regime demanding monitoring of school results and holding the school principal accountable for the results. This may also threaten the basis of trust, on which the relationship between superintendents and principals relies. The Norwegian municipalities, and thereby the work context of the school superintendent, is also to some extent influenced by NPM trends that have been visible in public governance in Norway for some years. Despite the fact that Norwegian policy makers have been relatively restrictive with free-schools, the current conservative government has launched proposals to open a more diverse group of independent schools within primary education. Shifting to the day-care sector, which is often included in a superintendent's area of responsibility, a large group of commercial institutions operate under the same area of jurisdiction as the municipal ones. Taken together, it is fair to assume that a slightly growing marketization (i.e., independent providers of day-care and schooling) will also add to the complexity of the superintendent's work role.

Anther major school reform strategy in Norway has been to transfer responsibilities for governing and managing primary education to the municipalities. In 2004 the municipality sector, through its umbrella organization NALRA,[5] was given the formal authority over tariff agreements with teachers. In 2006 the new national curriculum delegated responsibilities for local curriculum and reform implementation to the municipality sector, and thus, on the one hand, the municipalities are responsible for implementing state policy and providing public services for their inhabitants, while on the other, they are the units of local government, and can be considered a meeting ground for different local interests formulated and prioritized by local politicians. This means by implication that the municipalities are required to establish local routines upwards and downwards that are matched with the national sys-

[5] National Association of Local and Regional Authorities (NALRA). Norwegian akronym: KS.

tem for quality assurance (NQAS) insofar as evaluating, documenting and following up the results of the schools. On the other hand, there is in theory space for maneuver shaped by local politicians within the municipalities, in terms of municipal decision-making that can support and affect the schools. Specifically, the K-06 national curriculum presumes that municipalities should "fill in the gaps" in vague and underspecified goal formulations in the national curricula with their own local strategies, policy initiatives and prioritizations.

4 The Superintendent, the School Board and the School Leaders

This section presents short accounts of superintendents as they describe themselves, and of the two major groups with whom superintendents collaborate: the school board and school leaders. As noted, there are 428 municipalities in Norway, and each is a school district. In the majority of the municipalities the municipality council has appointed a school board to which policy issues of primary education has been delegated. In a minority of municipalities, 60, the municipal council operates similar functions. 291 out of 428 municipalities reported that they have a civil servant who can be conceived as a school superintendent. The school boards had a range of different names for the political committee responsible for primary education within the municipality, and this was also the case for the superintendents. We found approximately 30 different titles in use for this civil servant.

4.1 Characteristics of Superintendents

Lead Paragraph The average superintendent is male, in their mid-fifties, has been in this function for 3–5 years, and has typically been superintendent in only one municipality. They are typically an educator: their professional background in teacher education is supplemented by post-training in a school-related academic subject. They have typically worked in the educational sector for most of their career. They have not taken part in management and leadership training.

Gender: 60 % male – 40 % female
Age: in their mid-50s (<50 years: 27 % | 51–60 years: 46 % | >60 years: 27 %),
Professional seniority: 60 % of the superintendents have been in the post 1–5 years, whereas 20 % have served 6–10 years and 20 % more than 10 years.
Professional background: The background of the superintendents is clear and in many ways predictable: 82 % of the superintendents were recruited from the educational sector.

Academic background: professional background corresponds with academic background: 89 % were educated as teachers, most with post-education in teacher-related subjects. Very few have a master's degree in management or leadership.

School district criteria for superintendent positions: when asked what kind of qualifications school districts should look for in future superintendent applications, seen from the superintendent perspective, the most highly ranked categories were pedagogical education, general experience in leadership, administrative education and skills in human resource management.

Appointment procedures: Superintendents are in most cases appointed by a special administrative committee in the municipality or by the municipal council. They are seldom appointed directly by the board, and their appointment is a tenure position.

Superintendent titles: The restructuring of the municipalities after the millennium has found a wide range of job titles attached to superintendents. Only in 9 % of the municipalities participating in the study was the explicit term "superintendent" used.

Next-in-line chief: About 60 % of the respondents fit all the conceptual criteria of a superintendent used in the survey: 'Being directly subordinate to a political committee (60 %) and being in charge of all municipal education (98 %)', while 81 % reported that they were directly subordinate to the CEO of the municipality, and 71 % were permanent members of the CEO's leadership team. Seventy-seven percent were the immediate superior to the school principal. The field of responsibility for most was the broad field of education, including childcare, and adult education. They were, however, all in charge of municipal education (98 %).

4.2 Characteristics of School Board Members

Lead Paragraph The average school board member is male and has an education above the average of the Norwegian population. They have a lower level degree from university, and work in the public sector butt typically *not* in the education system. They are experienced local politicians who are also members of the municipal council. They are a member of either the Labor Party or the Conservative Party. School board members in Norway are not elected by the voters but appointed by the municipal council at the beginning of the election period of 4 years.

Gender: The distribution of members is 55 % male and 45 % female

Age: Distribution is widespread but with a concentration of members in their mid-50s.

Political-seniority: A majority of the board members had been active politicians for 8–12 years. Eighty-three percent are members of the municipal council, and 17 % are members of the municipal board.

Employment: Only 18 % of the board members work in the educational sector, which is modest compared with the traditional role of the school board as a forum of specialism. There is also a high proportion of board members working in the private business sector, a total of approximately 40 %, which on average is significantly higher than the case in municipal boards and municipal councils.

Education: The educational level of school board members is significantly higher than the national average of 34 % who have completed a university or university college degree (OECD 2009), and 66 % of the board members have tertiary educational degrees. Another 25 % of the members have completed upper secondary education and a craftsman certificate as their highest educational level, and only 2 % (20 members) have a primary education as their highest level.

Political representation: Members of the political board are politically appointed by the municipality council and therefore we should expect the composition of the political board to reflect the election result, but there are two exceptions: (1) 15 % of the board members belong to the Center Party, which is significantly higher than the results of the 2007 local election; and (2) compared with the total result for the 2007 local electorate,[6] the Liberal-Progressive Party on the right wing is under-represented in the sample.

Why joined the school board: When asked why they accepted a position in the political board, there are three strong tendencies in the responses: (1) Education is my personal interest – and it is important for society and the local community. The vast majority of the group of respondents expressed a clear motivation such as, "the importance and value of education in the local society", accompanied by "personal interests in education" and "personal interest in school development". A minority group said that, "I have children in school myself, so it is important to engage in this policy field"; (2) A minority of the remaining minority responded "my party asked me" or "my position was part of the distribution of posts between the political parties in the municipal council".

4.3 Characteristics of School Leaders

Lead Paragraph The average school leader is female and in their 50 years. They have typically worked as a school leader about 5 years, and the average school leader has a job as the principal of a primary school (level 1–7). Their immediate superior is the municipal superintendent.

Age: Most of the school leaders are more than 50 years of age (41–50 years: 30 % | 51–60 years: 38 % | >60 years: 23 %).

Gender: 44 % were men and 56 % female.

[6] Source: Statistics Norway (SSB), downloaded from: http://ssb.no/a/samfunnsspeilet/utg/200802/01/tab-2008-04-11-01.html – 6.11.2013.

Leadership seniority: The number of very experienced school leaders is low, while there are many experienced and novice groups (1–5 years: 37 % | 6–10 years: 25 % |11–15 years: 17 % >15 years: 20 %).

Education: All the school leaders are educated teachers.

Position: 58 % of the respondents were leading primary schools (1–7); 18 % lower secondary schools (8–10), and 19 % combined schools (1–10). The rest leads combined day-care and primary schooling institutions.

Next -in-line chief: area leader: 43 %, superintendent: 32 % municipal manager, 13 % CEO and 11 % "other leader".

Comments on the Relationships Between the Actors

It seems fair to assume that communications between superintendents and school leaders will be easy because they share a common professional education and socialization in their work path. This assumption is further supported by the fact that superintendents are mainly recruited from the same occupation as school leaders – that is professional teaching. Further, superintendents have only to a small extent take part in management training programs in business and public administration – and emerge basically as educators (Bjørk and Kowalski 2005). School leaders are increasingly subjected to national training programs, which are also influenced by more generalist leadership frames, but in the current study it is fair to say that they share common ground. In a theoretical sense, they share a common basis of identity, or 'normative and cultural-collaborative ground' in Scott's terminology. School board members, on the other hand, come to local school governance from a range of occupations, and less than one out of five works in the educational sector. In contrast, 40 % of the board members work in the private sector, and 12 % run their own businesses. Despite the fact that school board members express clear motivation for taking part in school matters, the discrepancy in background might create a cultural distance between school leaders and superintendents on the one hand, and board members on the other. Collaboration and tight partnerships between superintendents and leaders should therefore be fairly easily set up and maintained because they share the same cultural capital (Bordieu 1993). Inherent bindings and commitments to the normative and cultural-cognitive basis of the Norwegian unified school institution – as a function of their professional background – should support network formation and communication. A larger number of the school board members belong to other occupations and professions, which brings diversity to the governance line.

5 Networks

Lead Paragraph Superintendent responses indicate that they give primary priority to the actors in the vertical governance line: municipal top managers (and top management team) and school principals, and that they also use network ties to other superintendents actively in order to seek consultations. They also engage in

project groups within municipality organizations, which again increases the number of ties in their work and also gives access to a greater pool of knowledge and information.

5.1 Superintendents in Networks

5.1.1 Municipal Networks

Lead Paragraph The field of work for superintendents is being enlarged to cover primary education, adult education and day-care institutions, which suggests that they will gain access to coordination and strategic decision making beyond education. Superintendents are in most cases connected to the municipal top manager (CEO) through personal ties and membership in the CEO's leadership team at the top of the hierarchy. Superintendents also engage in informal collaborations with other middle level managers in the municipal hierarchy.

The superintendents were asked to assess their upwards relationships to the top management team and the municipal top manager. For example, the survey asks the superintendents to report their perceptions of the frequency in which their immediate supervisor manager, which in most cases is the municipal top manager, assesses their work. The most frequent category is once a year, described by 51 % of the sample. It is noteworthy that more than one out of three, 34 %, perceive that their immediate superior in the line of command assesses their work seldom or never. To capture the specific relationship between the superintendent and the top apex in more detail we asked about the availability and the propensity to which their superior engages in professional dialogue with the superintendent. The data shows that the superintendents perceive a fairly strong availability of their superior manager (when needed) and specifically for consultations about problems. On the other hand, the same immediate supervisors (municipal top managers) play a more passive role in educational engagement in their relationship with their superintendents. The content of the relationships is, thus, more of a general nature. The superintendent data also indicates a perceived influence on other sectors in the municipality through engagement in the senior leadership team. Eighty-six percent of the sample perceived themselves "as a part of the municipality's top management", and 72 % perceived influence on decision making processes beyond the school sector.

Ninety percent of the respondents were assessed by their superiors, annually (51 %) or every half year (14 %). It is noteworthy that 26 % were assessed infrequently. When asked about the reasons for the assessments, the responses were, in ranked sequence: (1) Identification of areas for improvement; (2) To compare objectives with results; (3) To develop relevant objectives for primary schools; (4) To contribute to my professional development; and (5) To monitor my work as a school superintendent. Superintendents explained that they can influence decision-making outside the educational part of the municipality organization. They reported that

they see themselves as a part of the overarching municipality organization, at the same time as they are leaders of primary schooling from the municipal perspective. In the assessment of their loyalty, they express a balancing act of defending primary education at the same time as they having loyalty to the municipality's political and administrative system.

Comments on Relationships Between Superintendent and Their Superiors
Superintendents collaborate and meet regularly with their superiors in formal meetings, and on individual person-to-person basis. They perceive that this context offers opportunities to take part in decision-making processes beyond the educational boundaries. They feel that their superior is available for consultation for them, but this dialogue is of a general nature and seldom about educational matters.

5.2 Networking Horizontally in Municipal Projects

Lead Paragraph School superintendents are also active players beyond the sole school territory through participation in project groups within their municipality organization. The typical pattern is participation in three project groups.

The data collection captures the extent to which superintendents in the sample engage in projects within the municipality organization. Sixty percent of the sample reported that they participate in three or less than three project groups. Forty percent reported participation in more than three project groups in the municipality organization. The data is silent about the content of the collaboration, for example in terms of agendas and issues that superintendents collaborate on across the municipality boundaries, which limits its descriptive power. In a similar vein, the processes in which project group members take part are not described in the data.

Comment on Municipal Networks in Projects
It is fair to assume that a superintendent's engagement in internal project groups offers opportunities to take part in coordination and developmental issues, with basically the whole municipality as target.

5.3 Horizontal Networks with Peers

Lead Paragraph Superintendents are active players in external networks with peers. They meet frequently with colleagues in other municipalities, and they also collaborate on a range of issues. They take part in multiple collegial networks.

The data also captures the extent to which superintendents in the sample engage in social networks with peers. The questions about social network engagement also provided fairly strong scores for professional ties to colleagues in external environments.

For example, 74 % of the respondents reported that they had frequent contact with other school superintendents, and 71 % also said that they participated in many school-based networks. Sixty-five percent of the superintendents reported that they collaborated with other superintendents in a range of cases.

Comment on Networking with Peers
Despite limitations in the data about the agendas and content of this form of network engagement, it seems evident that superintendents cross municipality boundaries frequently in their work, seeking contact with peers. Some also perceive themselves as central actors in these networks. Taken together, the data justifies the assumption that engagement in professional networks is a significant part of a superintendent's work.

5.4 School Boards as Networks

5.4.1 Relationships Between Politicians and Superintendents

Lead Paragraph School boards are frequently connected to the superintendent and the school office, related specifically to agenda setting and preparation for the board's meetings.

Agenda setting in a board is mostly made by the superintendent, the school administration and the chair: 68 % answered that the superintendent decided on the agenda together with the chair of the board, whereas 16 % answered that the chair of the board decided on the agenda. Only 3 % answered that the agenda was created by suggestions from the board members, while 8 % reported that the agenda was set up in previous meetings. A similar pattern was visible when school board members were asked about their assessment of the most important source of information for their work in the committee (multiple response categories), 88 % answered "information from the school administration", 68 % answered "official reports on issues", 53 % answered "information from the principals" and 40 % specified "impressions from school visits". The category "information from my political party" was only specified by 40 % of the school board members. These answers give the impression that the administrative core of the municipality is the prime source of information for the board members.

Comment on the Board's Relationship with Superintendents
The data reports on a common relationship between school boards and superintendents, where the latter actor is in charge of agenda setting in most cases. Superintendents are therefore active players in the policy process, together with the board members.

5.4.2 Perceptions of Influence on the Board's Decisions

Lead Paragraph School board members perceive that the school administration exerts strong influence on the decisions made by the board. The municipal board and the superintendent also exert significant influence.

School board members are asked to assess the level of influence from various stakeholders described to them as a board in decision-making. Not surprisingly the two highest-scoring actors, when it comes to the perceived strength of their influence on the decisions made by the board, were the school administration (74 % of the board members) followed by the superintendent (58 %). Principals scored only 28 % and municipal boards 40 %.

Comment on Stakeholder Influence
There are evidently strong ties between the school administration and the board, which confirms that the administrative staff and the superintendent are not separated from the policy process but active players. Not surprisingly, there is an image of an asymmetric relationship, where superintendents exert stronger influence on school boards than the other way around.

5.4.3 Perception of External Influence

Lead Paragraph School board members perceive significant influence on the municipality's decisions in school policy issues and school strategy issues. They also perceive that the board's work is important for general school development. When it comes to downwards relations to schools, the level of perceived influence decreases significantly.

When asked about their perception of the school board's political influence in municipal governance, the members felt that they were influential and particularly influential in the municipal council and board's strategic decisions and prioritization. For example, 76 % perceived that "the school board has the ability to affect the municipal council in school policy issues". Seventy-two percent perceived that "the municipal board takes the school board's viewpoints into account in school policy issues"; and 66 % "feel that the school board can exert influence on the prioritizations of the municipality". Finally, 68 % perceived that "the work of the school board makes a difference for school development within our municipality".

When it comes to a down-wards influence in terms of agenda setting at the school level, however, the perception of influence among school board members decreases significantly. For example, 36 % feels "that the school board is empowered to set the agenda for the schools' prioritizations". Of note, when board members were asked about their perception of being empowered to make "decisions about local curriculum development", only 20 % responded as agreeing and strongly agreeing. There were also very few examples of direct links between the school board and the schools within the municipality. As noted, there were only infrequent contacts

between school board members and schools, and the board members perceive that they have at best only meager influence on professional school work. The way that school board members may exert influence on schools follows two main avenues; first, through the strategic non-pedagogical decisions made in the municipal council, which in some cases also affects schools directly; and, secondly, through dialogue with the superintendent and the school administration.

Comments on External Influence
Taken together school board members, through their double membership of municipal councils, perceive that they exert significant influence on the municipality's decisions in strategic matters, but in a similar vein, school board members perceive only weak influence on the decisions made by schools and also financial prioritizations for schools. The latter is also a function of the centralized regulations of resource allocations to schools.

5.4.4 The School Board's Processes and Preferences

Lead Paragraph The most important process in school board meetings is, as expected, related to budgeting and financial control of the educational sector. Following up school accomplishments regarding policy goals is also ranked as important, followed by raising student achievements. Finance and budgeting is still the most common subject in meetings, followed by dissemination of information from the administration.

When the school board members were asked about the importance of policy issues in the board's meetings, "budgeting and finance" was consistently considered of most importance (91 %) accompanied by "follow up the school's accomplishment of policy goals" (84 %) and "leading the school" (75 %). "Raising the level of student achievements in national tests" was ranked as important by 58 % of the board members, and the category "local curriculum development" scored similarly at 51 %. We asked how often the various issues were on the agenda of board meetings. "Budgeting and finance" was reported as "often" by 81 % of the members, followed by "information from the school administration" (62 %) and "school quality issues" (51 %). "Student results" is scored as often processed only by 38 % of the members.

Comments on the Board's Processes
As expected, finance and budget control is ranked as both important and time-consuming in the meetings. It is also evident that informational and reporting issues consume significant amounts of time of the meetings. Notably, half the board members ranked local curriculum development as important, but they did not see themselves as influential in such processes, as noted earlier. The board also members saw it as important to improve student results, but they did not spend much time in discussing how to succeed in the matter.

5.5 School Leaders in Networks with Superintendents

Lead Paragraph Superintendents report that the most important actors to them in the municipal governance are school leaders. Collaboration and social connections between superintendents and school leaders follow a formal pattern in meetings, where school leaders meet the superintendents in a regular municipal school leader group. Superintendents and school leaders also meet regularly during daily contact, person-to-person. Seen from the superintendent's perspective, the main purpose of the collaboration is to facilitate and support school leaders in their school development endeavors. From the school leader perspective, it seems that the superintendents are fairly successful in creating a trusting interpersonal relationship and a fairly learning-oriented climate in the school leader group settings.

In Norway it is prescribed by the national regulations that all schools shall be managed and lead by a school principal. In the vast majority of cases, Norwegian school leaders are educated teachers with a long practice of teaching. School leaders have the overall responsibility for the development of school practice, to follow up on state and local priorities, and to follow up on educational outcomes achieved. A common pattern is also that school leaders meet in municipal school leader forums headed by the superintendent. Due to the many small municipalities and schools in Norway, a typical pattern (except for the largest towns) is 2–3 school leaders in each primary school.

5.5.1 Superintendent Dialogue with the School Leaders

Lead Paragraph Superintendents report that the most frequent issues in their regular dialogue with school leaders are financial management and school development. Despite the fact that superintendents are key players in the municipal part of the national quality assurance system, such issues are only modestly represented in their discussions with school leaders. The data, as such, gives rise to an assumption that mediation, in terms of translation and buffering, is an important part of the network, embracing superintendents and their respective school leaders.

We asked superintendents to rank in their own words their three most important tasks in relation to their school principals. 249 out of 291 responded to this open question, and we categorized the responses. Quality management is only modestly represented in the descriptive data about their ranked tasks, accounting for 89 out of 747 (multiple) responses or 11 %. Also within this theme, we can see a tendency in the rhetoric to avoid aspects of control in favor of the "softer" terms 'quality development' and 'quality system development'. The wider point is that quality management was self-reported at low frequency. Second, other administrative themes such as human resource management, financial management and coordination accounted for 344 responses or about 46 % of the total. Third, pedagogical leadership and school development tasks reported accounted for 238 responses or 31 % of the total,

which represents a strong orientation towards the professional domain of the sector. Fourth, tasks related to the "end product" of schooling, pupil achievement, school climate, special needs and learning environment, were only modestly represented in the bulk of self-reported categories: 49 responses or 6 %. The responses do not reflect a strong focus on student learning in the daily priority tasks, according to the dialogue with school principals. Finally, externally oriented tasks or strategic tasks were only weakly associated with superintendent school leadership.

Comments on the Dialogue Between School Leaders and Superintendents
School superintendents report their main focus areas as a combination of administrative tasks and school development orientation in dialogue with the school principals. The focus on quality management is weak, and so is also the focus on student achievement. The data supports the notion that mediation is a central leadership and management function as expressed by school superintendents. Superintendents are uniquely positioned to buffer, translate priorities and change the structure of preferences according to what they view as most important. Whereas the national agenda is relatively "infused" with strong quality rhetoric, this agenda is almost absent when superintendents rank their tasks and the issues they see as important in the daily leadership dialogue with their school principals.

5.5.2 Participation in Municipal School Leader Groups

Lead Paragraph School leaders regularly participate in municipal school leader groups normally headed by the superintendent. School leaders assess this participation in a fairly positive manner in terms of learning and supportive climate.

As noted, superintendents meet school leaders within the municipality through formal settings such as regular school leader groups. From a theoretical stance, this group setting constitutes an important avenue for superintendents to exert leadership. This forum may be tailored in order to adapt national and municipal policy initiatives to the realities of schools, and thus a potential forum for collective sensemaking. It emerges from a theoretical perspective that for this purpose to be fulfilled it is important that school leaders feel a supportive climate in the group, in terms of the school leader group being a "risk-free" zone for taking up difficult issues, problems and even their own failures. These issues are measured by the school leader's assessment of the learning climate, as they have experienced it in the municipal school leader group.

Eighty four percent reported that it was easy to "ask other colleagues in the school leader group about help", and 69 % said that it was possible to bring up "tough issues and problems when we meet" in the school leader group in the municipality. Finally, 64 % said that "it is room for coming up with new ideas in the school leader group of the municipality, even though it deviates from municipal plans". For the school leader group to work as a forum of collective sensemaking, it is crucial that the school leaders feel that they incrementally learn something of value from their participation, so that the groups can be described as an important forum for

dialogue and learning. For example, 74 % of the school leaders support the statement that "the work in the school leader group of the municipality has contributed to an increase in my leadership competence". Sixty-seven percent felt that through the participation in the school leader group they have "gained new knowledge that is relevant for my work".

Comment on the School Leader Group
The formal network embracing the superintendent and the school leader seems to add experiential work-related knowledge to the school leaders. They perceive the learning climate as positive, and it seems fair to link these two observations, which is in agreement with a range of studies into learning conditions in groups (e.g., Edmondson 1999; Garvin et al. 2008).

5.5.3 Trust Between School Leaders and Superintendents

Lead Paragraph School leaders assessed their level of vertical trust of the superintendents, and the response pattern indicates a fairly trustworthy relationship between these two actors in the governance line.

In interpersonal and intra-organizational settings, trust is defined as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau et al. 1998, p. 395). An important element in a trusting relationship is the perception of integrity between the actors (Schoorman et al. 2007). For a vertical relationship to be characterized as trusting, especially in an asymmetric relationship within an organizational hierarchy, it would be necessary for the weakest part to perceive the strongest as benevolent and also see them as someone with integrity. In this actual setting, a trusting relationship will then be characterized by school leaders' strong propensity to give their superintendent full information about work-related issues even though it might damage their future career. For example, 89 % say that they have "no problems with informing my immediate superior about problems in my job as school leader, even if it might harm my professional reputation". Similar statements on vertical trust score very highly; for example 92 % say "if I make mistakes in my work as a school leader, I have no problem in informing my immediate superior". Over and above this, the school leader data supports the notion of a fairly trusting relationship with superintendents, which also corresponds with the image from the data on the climate in school leader groups.

Comment on Trust
In four questions that measure vertical trust shown by principals towards their superintendents, the frequency of strong answers varies from 86 to 94 %, which taken together indicate a strong trustworthy relationship. It should however be noted in warning that the school leader data was harvested 4 years after the superintendent survey, so there is no a statistical correspondence between the sets.

5.5.4 School Leader Support Services

Leading Paragraph School leaders report that they mostly receive administrative office support, followed by support of the healthcare nurse and technical services related to the school building. Notably, only a minority of the school leaders feels that they are supported in budgeting and financial management.

When the school leaders are asked about the support services they receive from the municipality, 91 % specified administrative secretary support, 84 % specified a healthcare nurse and 82 % technical service personnel. Notably, only 44 % reported that they received support in tasks related to budgeting, accounting and financial management. This seems paradoxical, given the fact that 96 % of the school leaders say they perceive that the municipality strongly expects them to keep the budget and manage the school well in financial terms. In terms of their own role expectations, 91 % of the school leaders also rank the financial and budgeting tasks as important.

Comment on Support Services
As noted briefly above, there is a slight mismatch between role expectations and support structure when it comes to budgeting and financial management. This must be seen as noteworthy given that financial management is a rather specialized and narrow field of expertise.

5.6 School Leader Assessment of Municipal Support and Competence

Leading Paragraph School leaders assessed the general competence of the school office and their school owner as variable and partly mediocre in a range of important domains, such as law issues, leadership development and curriculum development. The school leaders seem more satisfied with the support they receive in leadership. It is noteworthy that the majority do not perceive work with the quality report as very useful.

In accordance with similar surveys of superintendents and school board members, the investigation also captured school leader assessments of competence (in critical domains) in the municipality administration to which they are subordinated. Only 56 % of the sample assessed the competence of their municipality as satisfying in "educational policies", which must be regarded as a rather mediocre score, taking into account the central role municipalities are given in the Norwegian school governing chain. In a similar vein, 55 % of the school principals in the sample assessed their municipality as competent in "law issues", which is surprisingly low. Third, and similarly noteworthy, among the principals in the sample, the municipalities were assessed as below mediocre when it comes to "competence in leadership development" (47 %), "local curriculum development" (45 %) and "evaluation"

(39 %). The assessment indicates a modest capacity for pedagogical and leadership skills throughout the municipality sector, and, large internal variation across the municipalities that are represented in the study.

The school leaders also assessed the general leadership support from their school office or school owner in a series of critical domains, such as school development endeavors, supervision and involvement in school development at the municipality level. Sixty-four percent of the principals stated that "the quality work of their municipality helps them in school development", whereas 58 % stated that "the supervision and follow-up activities by the school administration are supportive for school development". When asked explicitly about the value of "the work with the yearly quality report", only 40 % assess it positively.

Comment on Support and Competence
The findings presented above regarding assessments of competence in the school administrative apparatus in municipalities, paint a different picture to that of the data from the school board members and school superintendents. Bearing in mind that the data sets were collected at different points in time, they display a less satisfying image from the school leader perspective.

5.7 *Is there a Slight Element of Mistrust in the Governance Chain?*

Leading Paragraph The school board data displays a tendency towards low levels of trust regarding school leader capacity and loyalty in important domains. They ranked the superintendent higher in terms of competence.

When the board members were asked to assess their superintendent's competence in important leadership areas, such as "ensuring good working conditions for schooling", "allocation of resources to the schools" and their capacity of "mobilization for school improvement and school development", the results indicate only modest levels (variation in positive assessments between 50 and 60 %). Furthermore, when the board members assessed the level of competence among school principals (within their municipality), a further decline was observable. For example, only 32 % of the members in the sample saw their school principals as "fairly good in leading school development". When the board members were asked to express their perceptions of school principal loyalty (with conflicting interests about student learning), only 41 % of the board members trusted that "their school principals would side with the interests of the students".

Comment on Indications of Mistrust
The findings presented above indicate that the level of trust and loyalty (towards students) and capacity of school leaders, as seen from the policy sphere, is

only modest. This finding contrasts with their assessment of competence held by the school office, which they see as remarkably high, and it is fair to interpret this as a slight element of mistrust in the governance chain.

6 What Are the Superintendent's Motivational Forces?

6.1 Task Preferences

Lead Paragraph The task preferences of Norwegian superintendents show that, firstly, the administrative tasks attached to municipal leadership are the most preferable. Not surprisingly, budgeting and financial management are high-scorers in the ranking of important and time-consuming tasks. Planning and goal formulation also scored highly, and this group of tasks is attached to the superintendent's function as a municipal organizational manager. Pedagogical and educationalist tasks are also high in the preferences, however, both in terms of interest and importance, but the data supports the assumption that pedagogical tasks lose in the daily competition for the superintendent's time and attention. It is also noteworthy that policy implementation is time-consuming, because it can be interpreted as one of the many tasks derived from the quality assurance system.

We asked the superintendents in the sample to rank the five most important tasks in their job, the five most time-consuming tasks and finally the five tasks they found most interesting. Rankings were collected from multiple-response questions based on predefined response categories. The latter point might be noteworthy since the number of alternative choices is restricted by the stock of available categories. The five most important tasks ranked were: planning and goal formulation, financial management, change processes, pedagogical leadership and policy implementation. The picture is modestly altered in the following task-structure for the most time-consuming tasks: financial management, policy implementation, change processes, planning and pedagogical leadership. When the superintendents were asked to rank the most interesting tasks in their job, the list was as follows: change processes, planning, pedagogical leadership, financial management and competence management. The different rankings are illustrated in Fig. 4.1 below.

When the superintendents were asked to assess a number of pre-defined categories of leadership tasks in relation to their subordinated school principals, the pattern of assessments cluster around a set of transformative practices. For example, 92 % of the superintendents reported that they work frequently towards the clarification of the municipality's goals for primary education in relation to school principals. In a similar vein, 92 % of the superintendents reported that they worked frequently to stimulate the school leaders in their municipality to collaborate. Notably, these items do not self-report actual practices performed by the superintendents, but is rather a ranking list of leadership tasks the members of the sample see as important for a superintendent to carry out via a direct relationship with their principals.

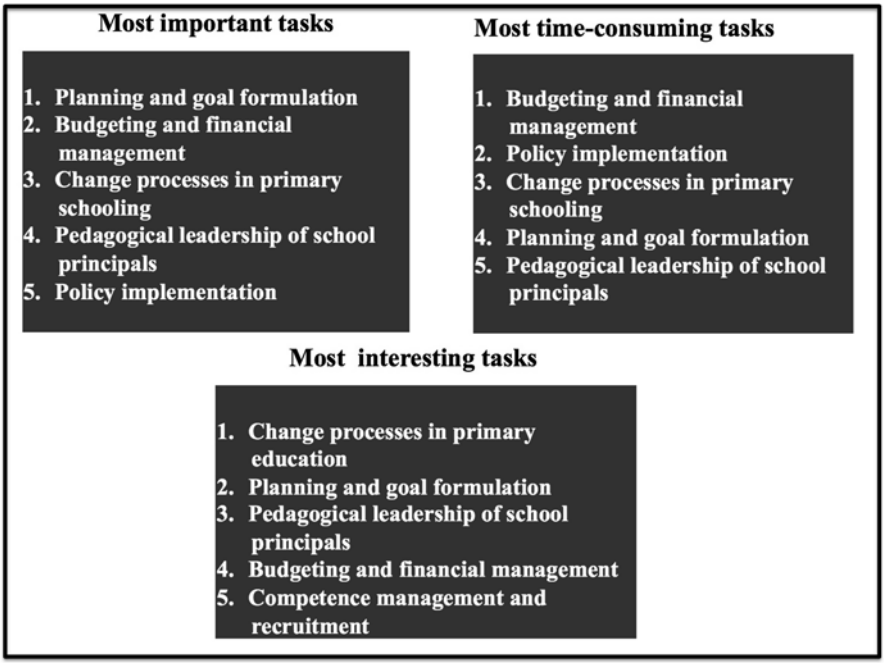

Fig. 4.1 Task preferences of superintendents

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

The figure above shows how *political and administrative issues* are ranked as of greater priority when it comes to importance and time allocation – in contrast to tasks of special interest. Notably, policy implementation scores highly on time consumption, low on interest and low on importance. Pedagogical leadership also scores only modestly in the rankings. These examples from the three ranking lists indicate that superintendents work particularly with more general, long term and strategic issues rather than day-to-day issues. They simultaneously indicate a kind of tension related to budgeting and financial management.

6.2 Motivational Drivers of Superintendents

Lead Paragraph Superintendents reported that their main motivation clusters around a sense of self-efficacy in perceiving their work as meaningful and important for the school owner, and around self-belief in their own capacity to develop school leaders in a positive direction. Superintendents see themselves mainly as implementation and change agents for schools and school leaders.

The superintendents were asked about the motivational elements of their work, and the answers clustered around a fairly strong sense of self-efficacy, manifesting, for example, in 96 % reporting explicitly that they see their work as meaningful and 96 % that they see the superintendent as "important for the municipality's role as school owner". Further, 79 % of the superintendents perceive that they can "develop school leaders in a positive direction". In a similar vein, 82 % feel that their "work makes a difference for primary education within their municipality", and, finally, 93 % hold that they can exert influence on primary education within their municipality. The superintendents evidently see themselves as fairly influential change and implementation agents in the governance of schools. Seventy-five percent report that they can impose decisions on school principals in accordance with their own assessments, and a similar number (75 %) recognized their own authority to assess the work of principals. When reporting their ability to motivate the principals directly to implement political decisions made by the municipality, the frequency falls, but not dramatically, to about 60 %.

Comment on Motivation
The responses portray a sense of meaningfulness in the job, paired with a self-belief of efficacy related to mastering the tasks – even if the workload increases further. Superintendents also feel high self-efficacy in schools and with principals, which is supported by the fact that they share the same cultural capital in terms of professional knowledge, documented in the background of superintendents as educationalists.

7 How to Bridge the National and Local Levels?

Lead Paragraph Among the different national reform elements currently running through, the superintendents most frequently point out the work with the quality assurance system. The Norwegian Quality Assurance System was introduced in 2005 with an emphasis on the yearly municipal quality report. It seems that the superintendents bridge the national and "street level" by using translation and mediation devices in addition to employment of the routine elements of the quality system.

In terms of national expectations, superintendents are formal parts of the national quality assurance system. As the key actor (in the information-production) of the municipal yearly quality report, the superintendent holds a premium position for gaining insight into national demands and expectations. Superintendents are also the in target for supervision and inspection carried out by the regional governor of education. When a municipality is selected for state supervision, the governor's staff approaches the superintendent of the municipality in question to organize the supervision, including the schools to be selected for inspection (called "visits") and so forth. In that respect, in the Norwegian system, the superintendent is the personal hub for information about national demands. Superintendents also receive informa-

tion about national expectations from a range of formal systems, in which their work is situated; specifically they report that their work is affected by these sources: "national test results" (57 %), "evaluation and quality reports" (52 %) and "national evaluations" (52 %).

We asked school principals to assess the value of the municipal quality assurance procedures, and as noted, only 40 % of the school principals see the yearly municipal quality report as supporting their local school development work. Regarding the state supervision procedures, carried out by the municipal school administration, 58 % of school principals perceive that the supervision procedures and the follow-up activities by the school administration "provides me with support valuable for the developmental work of the school". When we asked about the quality work of the municipality in general, 64 % of the principals saw it as helpful "for facilitating school development work". In a similar vein 56 % reported that the superintendent "monitors and is strongly involved in the implementation of school reforms".

Comment on the Bridging Function of Superintendents

The data supports, at least to some extent, the notion that superintendents translate national and municipal policies by utilizing mediator devices such as gatekeeper functions in terms of selecting the kind of issues that are set in the agenda with school principals. Needless to say, such opportunities probably do not apply towards the top of the governance hierarchy. Superintendents as educational specialists may also be a source of influence on politicians. Support for this notion is found in the school board data that portrays the superintendent as the most influential actor in the board's agenda setting, decision making and information acquisition processes.

8 How Do Superintendents Obtain Information?

The general picture is that superintendents utilize several opportunities to access relevant information and knowledge for their various functions in the job. The free form answers described a work role attached to both formal and informal sources of information embedded in the municipal hierarchy of authority. First, superintendents acquire a lot of information through their membership of the central management team of the CEO. They also describe this engagement as useful for their work. They gain information about the situation of school professionals, such as principals and schoolteachers, in the regular meetings with school principals within the municipality. Thus, mutual engagement in dialogue with school principals about school development emerges as a potent source of information about real life in schools. The same is the case for their joint discussions of municipal goals for education as an important source of information. In a similar vein, superintendents put only meager emphasis on the discussion of school results and national tests in the same forums.

When school board members were asked about their assessment of the most important source of information for their work in the committee (multiple response

categories), 88 % answered "information from the school administration", 68 % answered "official reports on issues", 53 % answered "information from the principals" and 40 % specified "impressions from school visits". The category "information from my political party" was only specified by 40 % of the school board members, in addition to "information from the teachers" (36 %) and "information from the teacher trade unions" (23 %). These answers give the impression that the administrative core of the municipality is a prime source of information for the board members.

9 Accountability and Responsibility

Lead Paragraph There is a pattern that the closer we come to a school's core business of schooling, the more the professional issues come to the forefront. Whereas school board members and superintendents have to put significant emphasis on financial and organizational issues, along with the implementation of policy goals, school leaders see the professional issues as most crucial – for example their own capacity to lead the school's pedagogical enterprise in a positive direction.

9.1 Issues Politicians Delegate to the Superintendent

Lead Paragraph School boards perceive that superintendents are responsible for quality assurance in primary education along with financial management of the sector. Superintendents then perceive responsibility for implementation of local political decisions and ensuring a satisfying level of student outcomes. Superintendents possess the authority to assess a school leader's work through their position as immediate superior, and they enact policy implementation in schools together with school leaders.

9.1.1 Superintendents

When superintendent are asked about the *external demands imposed on them from stakeholder*s, they ranked demand from local politicians at the top (64 %). At second rank is found national test achievements (57 %), which indicates that their work is closely connected to the political power-center of the municipality and to the national quality system of which the superintendent is an important target actor. Seventy-five percent of the superintendents stated that they possess the authority to assess the principal's work, and further, that they are positioned to implement decisions involving the school leaders in accordance with their own assessments. The data also indicates that this implementation cycle is contingent on the school

leaders' motivation base, which supports the notion of a joint enactment in setting out policy decisions in practice.

9.1.2 School Boards

Superintendents are directly engaged in policy processes through their work with the school boards, bearing in mind that only 60 % of the superintendents in the sample were subordinated to a political committee. As reported earlier, prioritized tasks for which the board feels the superintendents should be held responsible for are, for example:

- Student achievements in national tests
- Reaching budget targets
- Monitoring school results and quality indicators
- Producing the Quality Report

Not surprisingly, a large proportion of the superintendents (78 %) reported that politicians in the municipalities influence their work, and 58 % of the politicians in the municipality also pay attention to school matters. The evidence from both superintendents and board members also confirms that superintendents are expected to take responsibility for the whole "value-chain" of education, from day-care and preschool to level 10 lower secondary schooling.

Comment on Delegation and Accountability
Both the expectations of the board and the superintendent's own perceptions of external demands cluster round responsibility for student outcomes and satisfactory financial management. Although the superintendents were formally positioned to assess and instruct school leaders, they also acknowledge their dependency on their motivational basis and their capacity to implement action among the leaders.

9.2 Mediating

Lead Paragraph Superintendents see themselves as predominantly the managers of the municipal primary school system, and they are uniquely positioned to take initiatives towards school leaders, and thereby to translate and transform local school policies. School leaders see themselves and their roles as a trade-off between pedagogical leadership, small-scale organizational management and facilitation of learning conditions for students – in particular those with special needs.

9.2.1 Superintendents

Superintendents were asked to rank the three most important tasks in their job involving their relationship with school leaders. These responses were grouped into seven main broad categories: quality management, human resource management, administration and coordination, financial management, pedagogical leadership and school improvement, student learning and strategic leadership. Superintendent responses initially showed that quality management plays a relatively minor role in their agendas with school principals (11 %). We can also see a tendency within this theme in the rhetoric to avoid aspects of control and a greater tendency to use softer terms such as "quality development" and "quality system development." Administrative themes, including human resource management (19 %), financial management (16 %), administration and coordination (9 %), make up 46 % of the responses, displaying a relatively strong administrative work profile among the superintendents in the sample. Pedagogical leadership and school development tasks account for 31 % of the total tasks representing superintendent interactions with school principals, indicating a strong orientation towards the professional domain. The fourth theme involved tasks related to the "end product" of schooling, namely, student achievement, school climate, special needs and learning environment.

The data supports the notion that superintendents in the implementation of local and national policies perform their work as active translators and mediators of policy initiatives. For example, whereas 52 % of the superintendents perceive strong demands from parents, parental issues are seldom on the agenda in the regular dialogues between superintendents and school leaders. In a similar vein, quality assurance issues are translated into a softer rhetoric when superintendents meet school leaders. The self-reported data also reveals a gap between policy make' preferences and superintendent task preferences when it comes to managerial accountability (e.g., inspection, quality assurance, follow up of student achievement data).

9.2.2 School Leaders

School leaders are asked about the demands imposed on them by important role stakeholders and themselves. We focused on the two highest scores in each question 'How high are the demands of the municipality makes of you in the following fields'? The school leaders answered: to manage the school's budget (99 %), to ensure that students who face difficulties in attaining educational goals receive "adequate support" (99 %), and that the teachers' work is anchored in "professional and research-based knowledge" (97 %). Turning to the school leader perceptions of the demands, imposed on them by the state, they were asked 'how high are the expectations that the state has of you as leader in the following fields? The first ranking was "to implement legislation" (80 %), "to implement the new curricula (78 %), and finally that the teachers' work is anchored in "professional and research-based knowledge" (78 %).

Table 4.1 School leader perceptions of expectations of their work

According to school leaders, what are expectations of their work?		
School leader expectation of themselves	Municipality expectations of school leaders	State's expectation of school leaders
Lead the educational work in my school 99 %	Manage the school's budget 97 %	To implement new legislation in schools 80 %
Ensure that students, who are unable to achieve the goals, are given adequate support 99 %	Lead the educational work in my school 83 %	Implement revised curricula 78 %
Ensure that the teachers' work is anchored in professional and research-based knowledge 97 %	Implement new legislation in schools 76 %	Ensure that students, who are unable to achieve the goals, are given adequate support 78 %

When it comes to school leader self-expectations of their work role, the ranking was: "lead the educational work in my school" (99 %); "to ensure that students who face difficulties in attaining educational goals receive adequate support (99 %) and finally "to ensure that the teachers' work is anchored in "professional and research-based knowledge" (97 %). The school leader perceptions of the expectations are shown in Table 4.1 above.

Comment on Mediation
Superintendents are active mediators in the implementation cycle of national policies and local decisions made by the municipality organization. The findings concur with a consistent body of published work reporting that implementation is seldom a straightforward linear process. School leaders have a different interpretation of the expectations of state and municipality and they rank pedagogical issues highest themselves.

9.3 Control and Autonomy in the Chain

Lead Paragraph Superintendents perceive a fairly high level of autonomy in their work, and so do the school leaders. School board members see their policy processes as tightly connected to the municipal council, and in that manner, they see themselves as empowered to effect the municipal council in school policy issues.

The superintendents report a fairly high level of autonomy in three critical domains. First, 81 % feel that to a large extent they have control over their daily work. Second, 92 % perceive that they enjoy degrees of freedom, to make decisions related to their daily work as school superintendents. Finally, 67 % report that to a large extent they can conduct their own planning in the job as a superintendent.

Regarding the school leaders, 88 % of the sample perceive that they have autonomy in terms of how to decide the internal organization of their school. Seventy-six percent feel that they are autonomous in deciding the people who are hired to work in their school. Another 83 % report that they enjoy significant autonomy in pedagogical decision-making. School board members, on the other hand, feel that they are empowered to exert influence on the municipal council in school policy issues. More specific, 76 % state that the board has the ability to affect the municipality council in school policy issues, whereas only 36 % of the board members see themselves as empowered to set the agenda for the school's prioritizations.

Comments on Autonomy
Despite bearing in mind that data is collected at different points of time, an initial question is *how* three interdependent actors in the same governance chain can all be autonomous in decision making processes. One intuitive explanation is that they perceive autonomy in different domains of decision-making and that some of these elements can be fairly loosely connected to each other. For example, it is possible for a superintendent to enjoy autonomy in daily planning at the same time as the school principals enjoy autonomy in hiring teachers. These two areas do not conflict with each other.

9.4 To Whom Is the Superintendent Loyal?

Lead Paragraph Superintendents are hierarchically positioned at the intermediate level between the top level of the municipality and the school leaders, which could create conflicts of loyalty. It seems that the superintendents perform a balancing act that encompasses their identity as both educators and civil servants.

The superintendents see themselves as a part of the upper administrative leadership of the municipality (87 %). Conflicts of the superintendents' loyalty were tested through statements which indicated that the superintendents feel stronger loyalty to the school leaders and to other superintendents than to the municipality organization. The responses indicate a balancing act between connections to the municipal hierarchy and to the school profession. For example, 74 % disagree that they feel stronger loyalty to superintendents in other municipalities than to other administrative leaders in my own municipality. Similarly, 52 % reject the idea that they feel stronger loyalty to the school leaders than to the top management of the municipality, and 61 % reject the idea that they face difficulties in motivating school leaders to implement political decisions made by the municipality.

We also asked the superintendent in the sample in their own words (in terms of free-form answers) to reflect upon their work-role and its attached functions. In the smallest municipalities some superintendents reported that they have a combined role, where they also lead a school as a principal. In a situation with a growing number of tasks and responsibilities associated with the quality assurance system, the superintendents report about increasing work pressures. The changes in the gover-

nance system, with an increasing amount of performance data assembling, reporting, state supervision and school result appraisals – the increased work load also takes place independent of the size of the municipality. Even the smallest municipalities need to carry out the same tasks (related to quality assurance) as the larger ones – which evidently increases the workload of the superintendent. The descriptive data from the small-municipality superintendents also reports a lack of professional environment and also a lack of formal authority in the job: "*The role is challenging because it requires strong competence and legitimacy among the principals. This is also because there is a lack of formal authority attached to the superintendent role in our small municipality*".

Comments on Loyalty
The data gives rise to an assumption that the superintendents are capable of mastering a dual identity as civil servant and leading educator, but, superintendents in smaller municipalities have a stronger perception of dependency on their school leaders.

10 Tendencies

10.1 Further Integration of Education into Broader Fields

When the school leaders in 2013 were asked about their immediate superior in the municipal hierarchy, we saw a slightly nuanced picture compared with the main picture of the superintendent survey in 2009. Only 42 % of the school leaders reported in 2013 that they were subordinate to a superintendent who conforms to the conceptual definition, but, as many as 32 % reported that they were directly subordinate to a "municipal manager".[7] This specific civil servant role is more closely connected to the municipal top manager (CEO). A municipal manager most often is responsible for a broader field of responsibility, which can include cultural services, "child care"[8] (a part of the social services but for children and families with special needs) in addition to pre-schooling, day-care, adult education – and primary education. We therefore interpret this trend, slightly visible in the data from 2013, as a move away from a specialized school governance chain led by a school superintendent.

As noted, Homme (2008) also detected a tendency to integrate school policy issues into a broader field of actors when the municipal agenda was involved. She interpreted this to mean that when school policy issues were on the agenda there was a tendency for school boards to lose part of their sovereign position as a committee of specialism.

[7] Norwegian term: "Kommunalsjef".

[8] Norwegian term: "Barnevern".

10.2 Standard Based Pedagogy, Social Technologies and External Control

The increased use of performance indicators, assessment data and the monitoring of results represent new ways of coordinating the education system and a shift in curriculum understanding from input categories to output control. Performance indicators have also been connected to more definable juridical rights that can be monitored by state supervision and in the final event also brought to trial (Sivesind 2009; Sivesind and Bachmann 2008). In a wider sense, the increased use of standardized performance indicators in primary education, paired with a clear monitoring strategy in terms of making test results publicly available in real-time, can be seen as a move towards an external control strategy employed by the state. In his extensive policy review, Brian Rowan (1990) found that in the external control model of school reform, policy makers and administrators utilized three main tools, curriculum alignment, behavioral control and normative control, imposed on schools, principals and teachers from the top of the hierarchy.

Curriculum alignment in Rowan's terminology encompasses several comprehensive control instruments, such as "systems of input, behavior, and output control designed to regulate classroom teaching and standardize student opportunities for learning" (Rowan 1990, p. 354). These input and output control mechanisms are reinforced through the second main component, behavioral control of teachers and school leaders: streamlining in-service workshops for teachers, uniform approaches to teaching and uniform supervisory practices, paired with standardization of policy goals. Behavioral control and normative control also work in tandem and are often manifest in the form of standardized training programs for teachers, administrators and school leaders and in clear preferences for the kind of projects and developmental activities that will gain support from the governance system. In the Norwegian system, the National Directorate of Education and Training was established in 2006 in order to support curriculum implementation. Over the years, this state directorate has initiated national training programs for school principals, daycare leaders, leaders of special education and a tailored program for teachers who are candidates to apply for school leadership positions. Above all, the purpose of an external control approach is to "produce faithful implementation of a program's preferred teaching regime, through tight restrictions on teacher autonomy and a corresponding focus on a narrow band of teaching practices" (Rowan and Miller 2007, p. 254).

Although the Norwegian quality assurance system, with its extensive use of social technologies, is regarded as "softer" than the British and the Swedish state inspection, it evidently represents a case of institutional pressure to use numbers and indicators as the dominant criteria of the purpose of schooling. This briefly described trend can be seen in Norwegian school owner policy documents, where performance indicators and a standard-based pedagogy (e.g., Hattie 2009) are used as "benchmarks" for professional schooling. Taken together, the waves of standardizing pedagogy will expand the feeling of being caught in the crossfire for superintendents and school leaders.

11 Summary and Conclusion

In general, Norwegian superintendents seem to fit the conceptual definition of a superintendent, as presented in the research literature, fairly well (Johansson et al. 2011; Paulsen 2015). When taking the demographical and socio-economic context, in which the superintendent role is situated, into account, however, the Norwegian case is first and foremost characterized by large internal variation (due to the large number of small municipalities). The actual functions and work carried out by superintendents may therefore vary much more than is captured by the conceptual definition and the data presented. Notably, some superintendents have only one school under their authority, and many of these are also school principals in a combined position. The impact of the socio-economic context was described in the free-form responses by the superintendents from smaller municipalities, where they describe heavy work-loads, accelerated by quality assurance issues, time pressure and a perception of lack of authority.

School superintendents in Norway are typically educators with a task preference structure anchored in a professional educational discourse. The data supports the notion that mediation is a central leadership and management function as described by school superintendents. The superintendents are also active network players, and members of the municipality's senior leadership team. They are, thus, uniquely positioned to buffer, translate priorities and change the structure of preferences according to what they view to be most important. Whereas the national agenda is relatively "infused" with strong quality rhetoric, this agenda is nearly absent when superintendents rank their tasks and issues that they see as important in the daily leadership dialogues with their school principals.

Superintendents are closely connected to the national agenda through the national quality system, where they operate at the interface between state supervision (state governor staff) and the schools targeted for inspection. There also seems to be close connections between the superintendent and the political core of the municipality in overarching strategy matters. Municipalities have furthermore delegated authority to the superintendents to implement educational change with school principals, and the superintendents describe some degree of autonomy in micro-political implementation. At the same time, it seems that the superintendents are well aware of their dependency on school leaders when enacting school policy as practical implementation. In this process, superintendents act as mediators, in terms of buffering school leaders from certain tasks, changing priorities and translating and synthesizing policy goals into a rhetoric that helps school leaders to make sense of the reform agendas. The data indicates that the superintendents express loyalty to both the municipal hierarchy and the school principals, to whom they are immediate superiors. The data indicates high level of vertical trust and a fairly good collaborative climate between superintendents and their school principals. In theory, this pattern could be interpreted as manifestations of mutual loyalty and commitment between these two groups of actors in the governance chain.

Superintendents are experienced educationalists, as are school principals. School board members are also experienced local politicians with close connections to the municipal council and board and thereby to the power center of their municipality. Collaboration and close connections between superintendents and principals should therefore be fairly easily set up and maintained because they share the same cultural capital (Bordieu 1993). Inherent ties and commitments to the normative and cultural-cognitive basis of the Norwegian unified school institution – as a function of their professional background – should support network formation and communication. Most school board members belong to other occupations and professions, which brings diversity to the governance line, but their motivational basis for engaging in school matters, as expressed uniformly in the data, should in theory enable the actors to establish trusting relationships.

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