The Superintendent Consultancy:
A Structured Conversation to Support Network Superintendent Leadership

The Superintendent Consultancy protocol is a structured process for helping an individual superintendent (or group of leaders) to think more expansively about a particular, concrete issue. Network perspective is critical to this protocol working effectively and some of the participants in the group may or may not share the specific issue or Focus Question presented by the Superintendent.

This outline is a sample consultancy suitable for a discussion as part of the SAI/AEA Superintendent Network. It can be adapted as needed for different purposes and settings.

Suggested times for different steps are provided; these times will vary according to the Superintendent’s presentation and Network discussion. As outlined, the process lasts about 75 minutes. The process can be divided into more than one session if necessary and follow-up sessions can be scheduled.

GUIDELINES
- Respect confidentiality.
- Be respectful of the Superintendent sharing their issue and Focus Question.
- Contribute to substantive discourse.
- Be appreciative of the facilitator's role, particularly in regard to following the guidelines and keeping time.
- Facilitators: Keep the conversation constructive.
- Don't skip the discussion of the process (debriefing). What worked for participants in the process? What didn't work? What would they like to change next time?
- Keep in mind that the facilitator, Superintendent, and Network members are all participating as advocates and supporters of increasing our leadership capacity as Superintendents to improve student learning.

ROLES
- Superintendent: Presents context/background/history/status of the issue to be considered by the Network; presents a Focus Question for the Network to discuss.
- Facilitator: Reminds group of guidelines; keeps time; oversees the Superintendent Consultancy process.
- Network members: Engage fully in the Superintendent Consultancy process and considers personal/professional experience, training, research, thinking, and reasoning to address the issue and Focus Question.

PROCESS
1. Context/background/data/status of problem/issue presented by the Superintendent (5-minutes)
   The superintendent provides an overview of the issue and includes the context, background, data, and current status of the issue for the Network members to consider. He/she gives the context and highlights major concerns or problems on which he/she is
working. They include what has already been done to address the issue (if anything). The consultancy group is silent and takes notes.

2. **Focus Question** is presented by the Superintendent to the Network.
   (5-minutes)
   - The superintendent presents a Focus Question for which they would like the Network’s feedback on.
   - Clarifying Questions are asked of the Superintendent by Network members to check for complete understanding of the question. The Network members ask clarifying questions of the Superintendent – that is, questions that have brief, factual answers. The Superintendent responds to the questions, but there is no discussion of the responses by the larger group.

3. **Members share their understanding of the issue and of the Focus Question** to their table group (2 or 3) to arrive at common understandings.
   (5 minutes)

4. **Probing Questions** are asked by the Network to the Superintendent
   (5 minutes)
   - The Network members then ask probing questions of the superintendent. These questions should be worded so that they help the superintendent clarify and expand his/her thinking about the question he/she presented to the consultancy group. The goal here is for the superintendent to learn more about the question he/she framed or to do some deeper analysis of the dilemma he/she presented. The superintendent responds to the group’s questions, but there is no discussion by the larger group of the responses of the superintendent.

5. **Network Discussion** (in small groups of 2-3; Superintendent is silent and takes notes)
   (20 minutes)
   The small group then discusses the issue and Focus Question raised by the Superintendent.
   - What came to mind as you heard the contextual background?
   - What didn't you hear addressed you think might be relevant?
   - What do you think about the Focus Question?
   - What might you identify as strengths and gaps?
   - Considering your personal/professional experience, training, research, training, thinking and reasoning, what input can you provide to the Superintendent to help them address their Focus Question?

6. **Network Feedback** (one speaker per each small group)
   (20 minutes)
   - Feedback is given by a speaker selected from each small group to the superintendent regarding the Focus Question. The conversation should be about strengths and gaps. The Superintendent does not speak during this discussion, but instead listens and takes notes.
   - Additional open feedback from Network members is given to Superintendent.
7. **Superintendent Responds to Feedback**  
   (5-minutes)  
   The superintendent responds to the feedback of the Network. It is not necessary for the superintendent to respond to all the feedback provided.

8. **Group Discussion and Debriefing of the Process** (all participate)  
   (5- minutes)  
   The whole group discusses the session. This is an opportunity for participants to acknowledge anything they might have learned from the discussion/process.
   
   - What new perspectives did the Network participants provide?  
   - What questions about leadership or teaching and learning did this raise for you?

9. **Review of the process.**  
   (5-minutes)  
   - What aspects of the process did you appreciate or welcome?  
   - When did you feel most comfortable/uncomfortable?  
   - How could you apply what you've learned from this experience?

**CLOSING**  
Superintendent thanks group for providing their professional input to the issues and Focus Problem; Network thanks the Superintendent for the opportunity to support our ongoing growth as educational leaders.