Nordic Superintendent Leadership
Cross-Nordic Comparisons

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Project Rational

- Comparable superintendent surveys undertaken in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark in 2008 and in 2009
- Informed by US studies - adapted to the contemporary context in the Nordic countries
- We explore how superintendents’ leadership may be expressed given the varying national contexts of the Nordic countries
- Is there a common “Nordic” superintendent role, and what characterizes its properties?
- The project will also include a school-governance survey in 2011
- School principal study in 2011
School Districts and Superintendents

- Municipalities – the “entrepreneurial level” of the Nordic welfare states: Daycare, schooling, elderly care and coordination of healthcare services
  - Norway: 430
  - Finland: 345
  - Sweden: 290
  - Denmark: 96

- “The school superintendent is the holder of a position in the municipality’s administrative hierarchy between the chief executive officer (CEO) of the whole municipality and the school principals” (Johansson et al, forthcoming)

- Directly subordinate to a political committee or board
- Responsible for education within the entire municipality, and head of the school principals
The governance system in the Nordic countries

- A “mix mode” of local autonomy and indirect control and steering from the state’s side
- A general move to decentralization of powers and authorities from the state to the municipalities and in many cases further on to school level
- A massive growth of more subtle and indirect state-based steering instruments (except Finland)
- Evaluation, inspection, coupling of resource allocation to assessments, public performance data
- This shift contextualizes superintendent leadership in the “crossfire” between state accountability and quality control versus local government priorities

Sweden, Denmark & Norway
Ranked tasks and responsibilities

- Ranked tasks (expected, prioritized and judged as interesting)
  - Budgeting and financial management
  - Planning and goal setting
  - Facilitating school development in general
  - Quality assurance (Denmark)
  - Linking policy goals to school development
  - Pedagogical leadership
  - Knowledge management
  - Change management
- External oriented tasks, such as evaluation of student achievements, external collaboration and community relationships are systematic low-scores
Ranked tasks in relation to the learners

- Enhancing issues of democracy, values and pupil influence (Sweden)
- Work active with special matters for the learners and fighting marginalization (Sweden & Finland)
- Give a lot of value to the parents’ and students’ opinions and see their participation in developing educational services as important (Finland)
- Helping parents with their problems with their children (Finland)
- Ensuring school safety (Finland)
The first research paper will be published as:

- Johansson, O; Moos, L; Nihlfors, E; Paulsen, J.M & Risku, M: "The Nordic superintendents’ leadership roles: cross-national comparisons”.
- In: John MacBeath & Tony Townsend (Eds.): International Handbook on Leadership for Learning.
- Forthcoming in 2011.