A preferred vision for leading secondary schools: a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for leading secondary schools: a reflective essay

Abstract

I see the role of the Administrator as the commander and leader of the school's vision. Concern, compassion and consideration are strong virtues a leader must have. I think Administrators have the capability to have an impact on all areas of the school community. A true leader possesses the ability to get individuals to work together for the common good and the best possible results for all.

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A PREFERRED VISION FOR LEADING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Critical Elements I Consider
Essential for Exemplary Educational Leadership

Presented to
The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and
Postsecondary Education
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

by
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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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I have been exposed to various aspects of education all of my life. Education was always a pillar and highly valued in my home. As a young child I would ride the bus from my elementary school to my father’s place of work, which was Anamosa High School. I always looked forward to going to my dad’s classroom and wandering the halls of the High School. I was able to interact with a lot of the staff and even some of the students at an early age. I was also fortunate to attend High School Basketball practice, because my dad was one of the Varsity Basketball Coaches. That interaction exposed me to a different aspect of education. I saw the school gymnasium transformed into a classroom environment, and a place where young athletes learned about the game of basketball and also about the game of life. My dad often told me that he enjoyed his experiences outside of the classroom as much as he did in the classroom. He said it was another outlet, and another way to positively influence the youth. He took a lot of pride in steering his athletes in the right direction. He did not put in all his time and effort for a paycheck either. He did it because he truly cared about kids and their well-being. He believed strongly in what he did, and he had a profound impact on a lot of kids. Some of his athletes and students still keep in touch with him, and show gratitude towards everything he did for them during the days at Anamosa High. That same energy he demonstrated at school carried over into my home life. He always stressed the importance of education and involvement, as well as compassion and industriousness. He was strong in his moral principles, values and ideals. As I matured and grew up, I started to take on my dad’s same philosophies. Education became an integral part of my life, as well as involvement outside of the classroom. In high school I was active in many sports and organizations. I sought out as many opportunities to enhance my education and become a well-rounded person. I also looked to lead, as I saw myself as a leader, not a follower. I was class President for three years, and team Captain in three sports. Those leadership roles
were a great challenge and taught me a lot about myself as a leader. I strongly feel that a leader has a powerful influence on those he or she leads. In that respect it is vital to treat such a responsibility with serious concern. By the time I was a senior and looking at Colleges I knew immediately that I would attend the University of Northern Iowa and study Teacher Education. There again, I followed the same pattern by seeking out leadership roles. My workload changed a great deal from high school, but I still maintained a great level of involvement by staying active in several organizations. I was also on the basketball team for a brief amount of time as a walk on. That taught me a great deal about accepting rejection, and how to move ahead and not dwell on the negative side of things. I also learned that there is no substitute for hard work, and a team minded focus. College athletics prove that there is always someone better, and you need to work that much harder to stay ahead of the next competitor. That is a great piece of knowledge to attain for a leadership role. It is vital to always be alert and stay on top of things. I believe that being unprepared is preparing to fail. Learning from others is beneficial. However, it is vital to strive to control the things within your power, and not try to be better than others. By trying hard, and striving to be the best you can be, that can be controlled.

UNI was a great place to receive my undergraduate degree. I learned a great deal and felt thoroughly prepared to seek out a teaching position. Along with a teaching degree I also received a coaching endorsement. I knew that I would want to become involved in coaching as well as teaching. I strongly feel that people in education need to extend their duties outside of the classroom and go above and beyond the daily duties of an educator. That does not necessarily mean that everyone has to put in long hours and spend all of their time at school. I just think teachers should extend themselves to students and take an active role in helping them develop as individuals.
I have always enjoyed school. It was always a positive experience for me. I look back on my experiences and would like to help others experience some of that same success and positiveness. By taking time and showing concern I think you can promote that feeling of positiveness. The amount of success you see may only come in small increments, but by demonstrating continual effort the chance for success is greater.

I see the role of the Administrator as the commander and leader of the school’s vision. They do not lead as a dictator, but they definitely guide the entire school community. Concern, compassion and consideration are strong virtues a leader must have. A dictator type leader does not possess those attributes. I think Administrators have the capability to have an impact on all areas of the school community. They are not restricted to one particular area of the school; they have opportunities to deal with everyone and everything pertaining to the school vision. As a teacher in the classroom, especially in Special Education you are a bit restricted to your level involvement in the entire school community. I do include my students in many areas of the school, but I am beginning to realize you are still restricted at times. Sometimes I have a hard time dealing with the isolation and confinement to just the classroom. I did pursue education to teach and work with the youth, but my ultimate goal is to provide a positive influence for all students and help them meet and achieve their goals. I feel that by pursuing Administration I will have a greater opportunity to do just that. As an Administrator it is important get the entire staff on board. I want to work with others who share the same level of compassion and enthusiasm. I felt that as a leader I could encourage and empower others to take on the same level of ambition. A true leader possesses the ability to get individuals to work together for the common good and the best possible results for all. I am not the kind of person to give up easily. I am a motivated person, and I feel that I can help motivate others. I am a firm believer in
working together as a team. In education you have to do this in order to keep things running smoothly. Without proper motivation and encouragement I think people lose sight of team goals, and become more consumed with their own motives.

I would consider myself to be a humanistic. I am definitely a people person and I enjoy interaction with people of all types. Along with human relation skills I see myself as a strong leader and manager. I have always felt comfortable taking on responsibility and leadership roles. Sometimes I stretch myself too thin, but I seem to find a way to get the job done effectively and efficiently. Many times through collaboration and teamwork, I am able to succeed. Effective team leaders will make sure those under their supervision understand that they are working with the leader and not for the leader. It is important to develop a shared sense of ownership, and a cooperative learning community.

My professional experience in regards to involvement in school communities is somewhat limited. I know that experience is vital to become an effective educator or administrator. I do however feel as though I have had many opportunities to develop professionalism and good working/ people skills. I think I have a solid foundation in that regard. I plan to continue to develop professionally and seek out as many opportunities to learn more and gain valuable administrative experience. I want to be a life-long learner. I want to continue to take on challenges and put my best foot forward. I could not think of a better way to do this in education, than by pursuing administration. I think becoming an Administrator would be the culmination of a life-long dream and vision.

I have comprised four critical elements that I feel are essential for exemplary leadership. I feel that each of these critical elements are at the forefront of Educational Leadership. I have observed each of these attributes in successful practicing administrators. I believe that all
Educational Administrators must practice these elements in order to be effective. My focus is to strengthen my knowledge and awareness in each of the following elements, and someday practice them routinely as an Administrator.

A leader has a powerful influence on those he or she leads, perhaps even more so than anyone outside the family. It is vital that a leader treats such responsibility with the utmost respect. Leaders help mold character, instill principles and values, and provide a positive example for those under their supervision. It is a privilege to hold this level of responsibility. This obligation should never be taken lightly, because of its fine effect.

In my eyes, leadership is the ability to allow individuals to work together for the common good and for the best possible results, while empowering them. Leaders are faced with the difficult task of making decisions.

I have found a common set of attributes and qualities that effective leaders share and demonstrate on a regular basis. These attributes consist of industriousness, enthusiasm, loyalty, cooperation, poise, patience, and being well informed. Of course there are many other characteristics that constitute a good leader, but I believe these are the attributes that set apart excellence from mediocrity.

In light of all the attributes that comprise a true leader, I have also found one critical element that sets them apart from the rest. A good leader listens, truly listens. Listening is essential for an educational leader to be effective. Educational leaders deal with problems and situations throughout the entire course of their day. How can they truly deal with any matter effectively if they don't listen sincerely?

One of my favorite icons and American heroes is Coach John Wooden. I have read all of his books and to me he is the ultimate leader. He led by example and truly believed in what he
said and did. In one of his publication’s he stated, “Listen to those under your supervision. Really listen. Don’t act as though you’re listening and let it go in one ear and out the other. Faking it is worse than not doing it at all. A good motto is others, to have brains.” (Wooden, Jamison, p. 177)

I find great value in that quote as it truly exemplifies the kind of leader he was and the morals and principles he exuded. Hearing someone and listening to someone are two completely different concepts. I find a lack of sincerity when someone does not listen to what I say. In the world of work, it is vital to communicate. When a conversation is one sided or if a particular party is not listening, the conversation is void. I could not agree more with John Wooden’s philosophy on listening, and I try to model his philosophy.

I have been told that I am a good listener. I feel that by striving to listen to others, both sides can benefit. I feel that I may be of assistance to those seeking my attention and at the same time I can learn from what input they provide me.

There are certain attributes I think I possess as a good listener. They are aspects I try to improve upon and focus on when listening to others. First of all, I try to look for an area of interest in a speaker’s message. Each time someone speaks to me, whether personal or professional, I try to view it as an opportunity to gather new and useful information. Secondly, I try to avoid personal bias and avoid making immediate judgment. I cannot allow emotion to influence what I hear. I also try to listen to ideas rather than specific facts. This helps create thought and reflection as to what is being said. By reflecting, I can then mentally summarize and evaluate the message. By doing all of this, I can provide better feedback with whom I am conversing.
I sought more information regarding listening skills and found a book that summarized attributes of ideal listeners and many of their philosophies coincided with skills I strive to perfect. The following are listening characteristics of an ideal listener. Burley-Allen found the following:

- They keep an open, curious mind.
- They listen for new ideas everywhere, integrating what they listen to with what they already know.
- They are aware and thus listen to others with total being.
- They listen from the heart to help stay non-judgmental.
- They are not willing to blindly follow the crowd, when being aware.
- They maintain conscious perspective on what is occurring, rather than remaining unconscious and missing important details.
- They look for ideas, organization, and new ways of doing things; and listen to the essence of things.
- They know that no two people listen in the same way, they stay mentally alert by outlining, clarifying, approving, and addressing illustrations of their own.
- They are introspective and have the capacity and desire to critically examine, understand, and attempt to transform some of their values, attitude, and relationships within themselves and others.
- They focus their attention on the teller’s ideas while listening with feeling and intuition. (p.119-120)
When a leader makes an honest attempt to practice each one of these identified attributes, they will develop a better understanding for what is being said. Only then can the leader make an informed decision, and provide the appropriate level of feedback.

By becoming an effective listener, a leader can truly exemplify outstanding leadership. I feel that effective listening skills directly coincides with the Collaborative Leadership Standard. The Collaborative Leadership Standard states, “a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaboration with families and community interests and needs, and mobilizes resources.” Collaboration simply means to work together. One cannot lead if they are an ineffective communicator or listener. Cooperation is also a key factor when collaborating. Education revolves around team play.

Success in school and on the job requires people to work together and learn from each other. That is why I am such a strong advocate for youth involvement in sports. I strongly feel that sports show us how to work together to get the best results. Sports show how one must think of the group as a whole rather than just as an individual. When members of a team collaborate and listen honestly, a leader can also be led. It is necessary for a leader to find the best way for everyone rather than his/her own way. Stubbornness or insisting on having his/her own way is the antithesis for an effective leader. Refusing to listen creates narrow-mindedness. If these are the traits a leader possesses, they will never be able to achieve their goals or make any progress. Suggestions and the ideas of others should play an important role when making decisions. By listening, leaders keep an open mind. A verse, from John Wooden typifies cooperation and collaboration. According to Wooden (1997),

“Stubbornness we deprecate,
Firmness we condone.”
The former is my neighbor's trait,

The latter is my own.” (P.146)

I always try my best to be open minded and a team player. Whether I am with a co-worker, or a friend, I want them to know I have their best interest in mind. Sincerity is a key ingredient in developing relationships both at work and outside of work. The better I become in creating positive relationships, the more comfortable I feel in a leadership position. It will also make colleagues more comfortable with their leader.

The bottom line is all leaders must listen. If a person takes time to listen to others and gives their utmost attention they will be able to effectively assess a situation and make informed decisions. In some cases feedback may be unnecessary, but by actively listening the other party will know that the listener is concerned and truly cares. In a piece I read for my first research paper, I found a true statement that epitomizes my philosophy about listening and leadership. According to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education (1991),

“How a principal listens to and reads the school’s existing culture, communicates an interest, concern or disdain for existing traditions. All that the principal does, says and reacts to signals the values he or she holds. Above all else, a principal is a teacher in the best sense of the word.” (p.21)

An educational leader make a commitment to all the people he or she serves. The leader sets the tone for the entire team. According to Depree (1992), “Leaders can learn lessons from Jazz music. Leaders pick the tune, set the tempo, start the music, and define a style. After that it is up to the band to be disciplined and free. Jazz band leaders know how to integrate the voices
in the band without diminishing their uniqueness. Individuals in the band are expected to play solo and together.” (p.102)

I found this particular quotation to be a great lead into my second critical element for exemplary leadership. Developing teamwork is a critical element to articulate and foster as an educational leader.

I started this paper by creating my own definition of teamwork, and then comparing it to Webster’s definition. I define teamwork as a cohesive unit of individuals striving to attain the same goals by demonstrating integrity, and through unbiased opinions. Webster defines teamwork as, work done by a number of associates with each doing a clearly defined portion, but all subordinating personal prominence to the efficiency of the whole. Obviously, Webster’s definition is much more thorough and detailed than my definition, but in essence I feel that we are stating the same properties.

Each member needs to strive to attain the same goal, with the same sense of purpose, while avoiding personal recognition. Great achievements can be accomplished through individual effort. However, in a school climate it is imperative that goals are met through collaboration and teamwork.

I did some research and I compiled a list of key elements and ingredients, which are vital for highly productive teams. I found a consistent set of principles and underlying factors that help promote a team minded philosophy.

The first element in building teamwork is the development of group concepts. Schools consist of large groups of individuals. Each individual in the group comes from a different background, and possesses different opinions and ideas. There is a great deviation in personality types, which can lead to contrasting views and an inevitable conflict of opinion. It is my belief
that the leader of such a group must learn to cope with such differences, and try their best not to micro-manage individuals one on one. According to Dyer (1987), an ideal form of management is called, “Participative Group” management. This type of management requires an abundance of properties and performance characteristics. Dyer (1987) found the following characteristics in Participative Group management.

- Atmosphere tends to be comfortable and relaxed.
- Everyone participates in group discussions.
- There is a disagreement, but with intent to resolve.
- There is expression of feelings as well as ideas.
- The leader does not dominate, nor does the group openly defy.
- Lastly, the group is self-conscious of its own operations. (p.12-13)

Creating group concepts through the utilization of these properties and characteristics, provides leaders with a stepping-stone for team building.

My current place of employment is a highly effective institution of learning, due to the fact that we as a team demonstrate all of the characteristics mentioned by Dyer to some degree. The current Principal does an exemplary job of fostering and facilitating such characteristics, by making a commitment to a high level of excellence. The team then follows the precedent that he has established.

The second critical element I found in developing a cohesive team is a unified commitment. I characterize unified commitment and team spirit as close entities. Everyone involved in the team needs to be dedicated and loyal. A shared sense of enthusiasm and excitement must be apparent. Once every member of the group has eliminated selfishness, and replaced it with selflessness, only then can a unified commitment occur.
Someday, I intend to seek out the opportunity to become a school administrator. If given the opportunity to become a principal, I would take that level of commitment seriously and with great honor. Commitment and dedication would be my focal points of emphasis to develop outstanding teamwork within the school community. Both elements simply revolve around mental and physical energy, which must be a constant when in a leadership role. In order for a school community to excel the leader must demonstrate a serious investment of time and energy. In return it is up to the team members to adopt the same level of dedication, and demonstrate a willingness to perform up to the required expectations.

I am a realist, and I understand that in order to attain a level of commitment from those under my supervision, something needs to be returned in favor. I feel that by establishing clear and worthwhile goals the team will make a commitment and find a greater sense of purpose in what they are striving for.

High performance teams have both clear understanding of the goals to be achieved, and a belief that embodies a worthwhile result (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). Ultimately, when people are doing something that clearly makes a difference to them, they become enthused in what they are doing. I have seen this philosophy in its true light both in sports and at work. If the end result is clearly identified and attainable, it will provide every member of the team a sense of purpose. Selfishness is eliminated, and the team concept replaces the antithetical behavior.

After highly elevating goals are in place, it is crucial to provide support and recognition to help drive and sustain the vision created. According to Larson and LaFasto (1989), typical markers signaling the presence of external support and recognition include the following: The team is given the resources it needs to get the job done. The team is given the
resources it needs to get the job done. Those who are capable of contributing to the team's success support the team.

In my current place of employment, I receive an unprecedented level of support from the entire administrative team. The Principal has empowered me to do a task, and he supports my action. There is a level of trust in our working relationship, which creates a level of comfort for both sides. I take on a greater sense of pride knowing that I am entrusted and supported in what I do in regards to the school's goals and visions.

Someday, when I assume an administrative position I have every intention of developing that same level of mutual respect with members of my staff. If I can follow his same model of leadership, I will certainly develop a strong team community.

The last key element in developing teamwork that I want to identify may be the most important. Setting standards for excellence are key ways to ensure a firm level of commitment, as well as provide motivation to those on the team. Larson and LaFasto (1989) reported, "It is necessary to establish a set of standards that embrace several other variables: Individual commitment, motivation, self-esteem, and certainly, performance. The only way a standard is sustained is through its performance. Individual performance is the best method for sustaining standards of excellence. Also, it is important for teams to exert pressure on itself to make those changes constantly that improve performance standards" (p. 107-108).

Teamwork is an important concept in regards to all of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders. In the absence of teamwork, achieving each standard would be impossible.

Standard One pertains to developing, articulating, and implementing the vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community. If a unified team is
established and developed, the acceptance and articulation of the vision will be achieved. By practicing the previously mentioned team attributes, the school’s vision will thrive.

Standard two relates to advocating, nurturing and sustaining instructional leadership. This level of instruction pertains to both students and staff alike. If the school team is clear on the goals and has developed a sense of purpose, instruction will be more effective. Students will receive the appropriate level of instruction to meet required standards, as well as become productive young citizens. Staff will become more knowledgeable, and feel empowered to do their job to the best of their capabilities.

Standard three incorporates management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment. This standard most visibly reflects the type of leadership and level of commitment that is provided throughout the school community. The school climate is something visible. It can be felt in all areas of the school. When teamwork and concerted efforts are exhibited, there should not be any immediate or serious concern in regard to the management phase of the school.

Standard four relates to collaboration with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs and mobilizing community resources. Collaboration and teamwork are interchangeable terms. In order to establish and maintain high levels of collaboration, all factors and components regarding teamwork need to be practiced and fine-tuned.

Standard Five promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. Team players have high levels of integrity, and strive to be fair. Through practice and through learning of team concepts, all of the components pertaining to ethics will disseminate.
The sixth and final standard relates to the understanding, responding to, and influencing of the larger political, social, economical, legal and cultural context. Asides from knowledge and being well informed to make legal and ethical decisions, teamwork would be the next element at the top of my list for this particular standard. Partisan gain will be much more likely to occur if the leader is a team player and those under he or she are team players too. Schools thrive on support, and as a leader it is necessary to foster a plan that will embrace the goals and visions of the school.

I believe that educational administrators must also be visionary leaders in order to ensure success within their schools and school districts. Standard One of the ISLLC standards deals with visionary leadership. Standard One states, “a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school district vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.” (Wilmore, p. 19)

Standard one is the foundation upon which all other facets of the learning community are built. As Stephen Covey states, “We must begin with the end in mind.” (Covey, p. 50) The underlying principle behind beginning with the end in mind is that there are two creations, one mental and one physical. The mental creation precedes the physical creation. We must first conceive of something in our minds before we can begin to create it, or put it into action.

The school administrator must be a visionary leader for the school community. As the leader, the administrator must have a picture in his mind about what direction he believes the school or the district needs to be headed in. Once the administrator has determined the mind picture she needs to lead the school or district in a specific plan of action that will get the organization to that point. Standard one and the administrator’s ability to conceive in their
mind the place where the school or district must go sets the table for all other aspects shaping the learning environment.

According to standard one there are four steps to the creation of a vision for the educational community. First, the community must develop a plan of action. Second, those involved in the development process need to articulate, or communicate, the plan of action to others who will have a role in the educational community. Third, the plan must be implemented. Finally, after implementation has occurred, the plan must be maintained, reviewed, and revised as necessary. (Wilmore, p.20)

As the administrator begins the development process she must remember two things. First, standard one states that a school administrator promotes the success of all students. Administrators must care for and be interested in the betterment of each and every student served by the school community. Second, the development process must be a collaborative process where the administrator seeks the help of the many different groups of people who have a vested interest in the process. In some of the groups the administrator must seek to involve and include students, faculty, staff, family members, other community members, and the business community. Together, these groups must seek data that will help them determine a school community vision of the future. Once they have examined the data, they must develop goals and strategies that are specific and will help the school community attain the vision. In order for people to support the vision, they need to be involved in the development and implementation of the vision.

The development of the vision will most likely culminate in the writing of a vision statement or mission statement for the school district. According to Covey, a mission statement is a powerful document that expresses a sense of purpose and meaning, it acts as a
governing constitution by which you evaluate decisions and choose behaviors. (Covey, p.55)
The mission statement becomes the beacon of light the educational community is constantly
striving to attain. It encourages the community to think deeply, examine innermost thoughts
and feelings, and clarify what is really important. It provides direction and commitment. All
decisions must be based on whether or not they serve the purpose of the educational
communities vision.

Once the development process has taken place and a vision or mission statement is
developed, it is time to articulate the vision to the community. This process relies on
communication from those involved in the development to the greater community. Students,
family, community members, civic groups, businesses, and other interested parties must be
informed of the educational communities vision. Not only must they be informed, they must
be shown ways in which they may get involved and help the educational community attain
the vision. It is vitally important for the school administrator to be both a leaders and advisor
throughout this process. The administrator must advise by showing how the vision is to be
shared and knowing how the community at large can become a part of the vision.

Once the vision is articulated it must be implemented. The administrator’s job is to
oversee the implementation process. He must ensure that everyone is involved and
empowered within the implementation process. (Wilmore, p.21) This process will involve
the attempt to achieve specific strategies and goals in order to fulfill the vision. This part of
the process involves not only achievement of goals, but ways to measure the achievement of
goals. Assessment processes must be developed to ensure that the goals are met. As
Wilmore states, “What gets measured gets done.” (Wilmore, p.22) All activities leading to
the attainment of the vision must be continually assessed for efficacy. The information from
the assessment process will drive the direction in which the educational community must go. Results from assessment will tell the community whether they are headed in the right direction and whether or not they need to adjust the vision altogether.

The final stage of the vision processes involves good stewardship of the vision. This is the most vital stage of the process and the stage in which the school administrator’s ability to lead and guide are essential. It is at this point that the school administrator must constantly ensure that the momentum built in the first three phases of the process is maintained. The administrator must also help people continually reassess where the educational community is in relation to attaining the vision. Reassessment can only come with deep reflection and analysis of where the educational community has been, where it is, and where you believe it is going. Wilmore states that a true steward is one who will always be there to encourage others and themselves to get back up when they fall down. (Wilmore, p.23) This is the point at which the school administrator must assume the responsibility to support, nurture, and sustain the vision. She must encourage everyone and keep everyone focused on the vision and how to attain it.

The development, articulation, and implementation of the vision create synergy. Covey describes synergy as the habit of creative cooperation. (Covey, p.154) When a community reaches a state of synergy they apply win-win thinking and empathic communication to achieve their goals. The community looks at the problems they are presented with, they begin to understand the problems, and they work to provide solutions that otherwise would not have been possible. The creation of synergy simply means that together as a whole, the community attains much more than it would have if it had worked separately. When synergy is attained stakeholders become energized and motivated to work toward the vision.
The administrator’s role in the synergy process is to facilitate the process. This is the final piece to the puzzle and the ultimate way in which the administrator ensures the stewardship of the vision. The administrator must work with all involved and continually analyze implementation and stewardship. At this point the administrator must seek to understand the needs of all involved and work to bring the educational community and all it’s stakeholders together as one entity. An administrator’s first and foremost duty it to be a visionary leader who understands where the educational community needs to go. He must communicate his understanding to all involved. He must work to bring all members of the educational community together to attain the vision.

The National Policy Board of Educational Administration sums up educational leadership quite succinctly by stating that administrators, “give purpose and direction for individual and group processes; shape school culture and values; facilitate the development of strategic plan and vision for the school; formulate goals and planning change efforts with staff; and set priorities for the school in the context of community and district priorities and student and staff needs. (Cunningham, p.136)

The notion of having morals, values, and ethics within the framework of day-to-day business in American society has taken a beating in recent years. Many scandals and setbacks from some of America’s largest employers and the people who run America’s largest corporations have led Americans to question whether there is any morality left in American society. In recent years public debate has centered on how schools should teach morals, values, and ethics. Standard 5 of the ISLLC standards states; a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
The first part of standard 5 asks that a school administrator act with integrity. What does acting with integrity mean and what does it involve? Webster’s New World Dictionary defines integrity as completeness; wholeness and uses the words honesty and sincerity to further describe integrity (Agnes, 1996). The school administrator must work to bring integrity to the school community by developing trust. This trust is developed through being open, honest, and sincere with everyone the administrator comes in contact with. Developing trust comes from nurturing relationships with all of the stakeholders of the school community, fellow administrators, staff, parents, and most importantly, students. In developing these relationships the administrator must remember that the best interests of the students and the school community as a whole must always be taken into consideration. The best way an administrator can show integrity and develop trust is by showing a drive and desire to do everything possible to promote the success of all students, staff, and families.

The second part of standard 5 asks that a school administrator act with fairness. The whole notion of fairness revolves around the very difficult task of making decisions in the life of a school administrator. I believe the best and simplest way for an administrator to ensure fairness within the decision-making process by developing plans and systems upon which decisions must be based. The plans and systems should provide consistency in the process. One of the best ways to build integrity and fairness it to admit when a mistake has been made, to apologize for the mistake, and to take all necessary steps to correct the mistake.

I believe it is important to note here that fairness is often confused with equal. A school administrator must realize that what is fair is not always going to be what is equal. Our students come from many and various backgrounds and each student is an individual with individual needs. As decisions are being made about each student it is important for the administrator to...
take into account the student’s background and ask what is fair. Fair will always be the decision that is in the best interest of that individual student. The fair decision may not be an equal decision with those decisions being made about other students, however. Once again, the difficult decisions faced by an administrator may often look unequal, but should always be fair to the individual.

The third part of standard 5 asks that school administrators act in an ethical manner. Webster’s New World dictionary defines ethics as the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment. Standards of conduct are reinforced in the school community through the vision and mission statements of the school or district as well as the rules and regulations developed by the stakeholders and adopted by the school board. The school administrator fulfills the ethics of his position within the school community by ensuring that the vision and mission are strived for. The administrator must also take the position that the rules and regulations are vital and will be adhered to by all stakeholders. Wilmore suggests that the school administrators can incorporate ethics by seriously considering all aspects, empowering those involved in the decision-making process, analyzing all factors, and then reaching the best data-driven decision (Wilmore, 2002).

Another way of ensuring ethics is to use the Four Way Test developed by the Rotary Club International for confronting issues. One should ask the following four questions: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it be beneficial to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? If the answer to all four questions is yes, then you will most likely have made an ethical decision.

Ethical values in our leaders have come to be a very important character trait in the 21st century. Daft describes ethics as the code of moral principles and values that governs the behavior of a person or group with respect to what is right or wrong. He goes on to further state
that ethics set standards as to what is good or bad in conduct and decision-making. He believes that leaders influence ethical values through their personal behavior as well as through the organization's systems and policies. It is important for the leader to work from an ethical framework because employees, and in our case, students learn about values from watching the actions of leaders. Daft suggests that values-based leaders know what they stand for and they have the courage to act on their principles when making decisions (Daft, 2001).

A Code of Ethics is a formal statement often adopted by a corporation or organization that expresses their ethical values. A school community may generate a Code of Ethics by looking at their vision and mission statements and by developing a set of guiding principles. The guiding principles at Kennedy High School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa include the notion that Kennedy is a learning community for everyone. Everyone is challenged to set and attain goals for excellence. Everyone recognizes the value of continual learning for self-enrichment and for career success. Cooperation with others is a key ingredient in success. Everyone deserves trust and respect. Finally, leadership is everyone's responsibility. These guiding principles communicate to all stakeholders what the school stands for and it encourages ethical behavior. In looking at keywords in the guiding principles we see that Kennedy considers itself to be a learning community striving for excellence, self-enrichment, success, cooperation, trust, and respect. If everyone is aware of and strives to fulfill the guiding principles then the goal of an ethical community will be achieved.

Wilmore sees standard 5 as the culmination of all the other standards. She states that if we are appropriately and prudently researching, analyzing, synthesizing, soliciting, advocating, nurturing, and sustaining everything that relates to school leadership, then we are acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. The school administrator must have the leadership
skills necessary to show the school community through his actions and his decisions that integrity, fairness, and ethics are an important part of the organization. He must also expect these qualities from each and every stakeholder in the school community. Integrity, fairness, and ethics are a very achievable goal in our school communities when we work together and determining that they are the worthwhile backbone of how we conduct ourselves and our decisions on a daily basis.
References


