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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

Timothy S. Harvey
University of Northern Iowa

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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

The purpose of this reflective research paper is to articulate my fundamental values and beliefs that will guide me as I prepare to enter the professional field of educational administration. I will begin with a general overview of what brought me to this point in my life. The paper will then examine specific values and beliefs identified in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards, (ISLLC), of Visionary Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Organizational Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Ethical Leadership and Political Leadership. My goal is to exhibit these leadership standards throughout my educational career.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

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of the Requirements for the Degree

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Date Approved

Victoria Robinson

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Robert H. Decker

3/21/03

Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

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Date Received

Michael D. Waggoner

Head, Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

The purpose of this reflective research paper is to articulate my fundamental values and beliefs that will guide me as I prepare to enter the professional field of educational administration. I will begin with a general overview of what brought me to this point in my life. I am an educational leader. The paper will then examine specific values and beliefs identified in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards, (ISLLC), of Visionary Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Organizational Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Ethical Leadership and Political Leadership. My goal is to exhibit these leadership standards throughout my educational career.

Before analyzing my personal motives for entering the educational field, I must first make a mission statement or personal belief about life and education. Learning is a life long endeavor. It begins at birth and will continue until the last dying breath. I believe this with my whole being. I also believe in an ancient Chinese saying, which I have seen and heard so many times throughout my days. I first heard it in the eleventh grade in my American Government class. The class was taught by a man I truly respected, Mr. John Mckey. The proverb goes like this . . . when the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

The Chinese proverb is so true. After high school, most of my friends attended college. I felt that college was something my smarter friends did, so as

they packed off to colleges and universities across the state, I packed off the to University of Rath Packing Company. As I reveled in the fact that all my friends were struggling to make the mark, I was earning a cool thirteen dollars an hour. In that four-year period, many of my friends dropped out of college only to start back up at a later date. I, on the other hand, learned that factory work was not for me. As I stood on the hog cut floor, hooking sides, my mind grew numb. At first, days one through four, it was exciting and new. By day five I was convinced the cut foreman could train a gorilla to do the job I was doing. Once you get a job like this, it is very hard to get out. The money and all the material benefits it brings trap you. As I stood and worked, I began to ask; what is it I want to do with my life? I thought about many different careers; sales person, businessperson, high finance. I did not believe I could sell something to people they did not need, nor did I think using other peoples' money to profit myself was very ethical. As the days, months and then years passed, teaching was the one career that kept returning in my mind. I had some really great teachers that influenced my friends and myself. These teachers helped create all the productive adults in the world. Without them, we have no doctors, lawyers or future administrators. Don't get me wrong, at that time in my life, I worked from the

pessimistic view, not the optimist view. So, in those days, I thought I had some really inadequate teachers; an English teacher who could not spell; a gym teacher who was obese and smoked; and a guidance counselor, Maynard Hamilton, who told me “Harvey, you won’t amount to a tinkers damn, you might as well go and start pumping gas now, today”. This was said to me during a conversation in his office at East High School on Career Day. It was not until four years later, standing there on the cut floor that I realized my guidance counselor knew I would not give up and quit. The old fox was using reverse psychology on me and it worked. In the summer of 1985, I began my educational career. Some of my friends never went back to college. Others took a year off and then returned. I took an altogether different path. I, the student, was now ready, and many teachers appeared to work their magic. So many young people are not ready for college. Factory work or the military might help them mature and be ready for a life of learning as it did me. Learning must be on the individual’s own terms. When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. I was ready.

Visionary Leadership

ISLLC Standard number one: Visionary Leadership states that the administrator has knowledge and understanding, the administrator believes in values and is committed, and the administrator facilitates, processes and engages

in activities ensuring future education changes for the whole community.

Olatohumbo Fashola (1998) writes about this visionary standard in his article about school reform models.

Fashola reviewed and analyzed many school reform models that are for sale on the educational market today. Their scope of review in writing about reform models focused on models that were designed to affect core aspects of school functions. Not only did they look at the common areas of class instruction and curriculum; they dove into areas with more substance. They looked at factors such as professional development, governance, class management, and family support and community involvement.

I feel that Fashola's article was very well researched and informative. He describes school wide reform models such as "Success for All", "Roots and Wings", "Accelerated Schools". These are a few that are nationally available. Fashola summarized the evidence of the models effectiveness in the test school as well as results from outside test districts, which shows they really did their research. I feel it was informative also because I, the reader, can learn from it. One idea my fellow undergraduates and I have always said; "you don't need to reinvent the wheel". Not only did Fashola express that very idea, but two other scholars as well. Fashola proves it by explaining to educators that each school is

different and therefore should put together their own model by borrowing bits and pieces from different, already established models and adapting it to meet individual school needs. Just because a reform model works well in Newton, Iowa, does not mean it will work in Waterloo. There are different types of students with different types of cultures and different types of community supports. I believe that administrators should have the knowledge and understanding of learning goals in a pluralistic society. The other thing that I found to be very informative was the difference between Chapter 1 and Title 1 monies. Coming from a private school, I don't know if we get either or whether we qualify. This is something I will look into. One of the performance goals of a good Administrator is that they engage in activities ensuring that they get the needed resources to support the implementation of the school missions or goals. Fashola points out that Chapter 1 monies were allocated for at risk individual students and we looked only at the student's individual achievements. As of 1994, reauthorization of funds gave us Title 1, which gave us monies for broader school wide projects, such as school reform models.

One of the wider used programs that Fashola assessed was a model called "Success for All". This model seemed to me to be the one that had the most going for it. I say that because of the versatility for the student, teacher, parent and the

community at large.

My number one goal in the area of performance as an administrator which Fashola points out is that the vision of the administrator and building staff must be similar or the same as the parents, students and other stakeholders in the community. If the model is to be successful, all community members, for the most part, need to be on the same page. This is done by developing and implementing the model with and among the community members.

The administrator should believe in values and should be totally committed to continuously examining individual assumptions, beliefs and personal practices during governance according to ISSLC Standard D1.6. Not only should the administrators follow this vision, but also so should the teachers according to the “Success for All” model, which has a professional development component. In this component all staff become student, coach and facilitator.

I think the most important component to the “Success for All” model which reiterates ISLLC Standard D1.4 that states the inclusion of all members involved in the school community. With this component a lot of the personal issues that come into the school every day may be elevated, which will help the student and family focus more on the child’s education. This model addresses family and societal issues like truancy, health care services, behavioral problems

in school and at home, and home/school relations.

Knowledge and vision grows with those who discipline themselves to think about what it is they know and what it is they need to know to complete a visionary goal they and the community have. This is not done without questions and reflection. William G. Cunningham (2000) states:

We now know enough to develop the schools we need, but, our Current thinking is holding us back. We must change our frames of reference, our paradigms, our mental models, and our meta-narratives when they no longer meet the needs of our times. They are invisible elements that influence the way we think, and our ability to envision the future. We can operate “without thinking” in a habitual state because our meta-narratives, our belief systems, are so familiar to us. However, they also hold us back from seeing that present situations do not support practice as usual, that our existing philosophical beliefs and related knowledge have blinded us. New frames can accentuate previously unnoticed possibilities; new relationships, previously unseen can become viable. For these reasons administrators should continually revisit and reflect on their platforms.

“Significant improvements can start with the system that is already in place, but is always can be radically improved. Our practice is held captive by our theory, our knowledge base, and our experiences. We must ensure that the ideas, positions, and theories that enjoy privileged positions of unquestioned supremacy and thus are viewed as the “truth” are themselves questioned when new ways of seeing things are evolve. The challenge is in how we pursue knowledge and how knowledge is expanded.” (Rhodes, 1997).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional Leadership is the second ISLLC Standard which states a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture. The educator, Siegfried Engelmann (1999), argues the benefits of direct instructional teaching. Engelmann believes that at-risk students often began school academically behind, but using a highly structured setting and his approach can help at-risk children catch up.

According to Engelmann, at-risk students in the 4th grade often do not master the skills they are scheduled to learn in the 1st grade. To even the playing field, an effective solution is to make well designed preschool-kindergarten programs. This program is for at-risk students only. ISLLC Standard P2.1: All individuals are treated with fairness. . . Fairness means you get what you need to be successful, not everyone gets the same program. For the academic race to be fair at-risk students need to be placed in programs like Engelmann's because children at the age of two did not get placed in an environment that exposed them to the language/language activities to make them successful.

ISLLC Standard K2.11: School cultures and instructional programs

conducive to student learning. Engelmann states this goal can be achieved if the format of the programs are highly structured and permit the teachers to present large amounts of practice. Programs need to be all day and be 10-25 minutes in length to hold the student's interest. The direct instruction is mostly oral with a small part of the day dedicated to working on self-initiated student projects.

Does direct instruction with at-risk preschool-kindergarten students work?

ISLLC Standard P2.23: The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that analyzes, interprets, and used educational research for improving student learning. Engelmann does just that. According to Becker and Engelmann (1978), outcomes or project follow through show that children who started direct instruction in kindergarten are accelerated about seven months over children who start the program in 1st grade. Imagine the outcomes if students begin in a two-year preschool program. Engelmann also sites a large study of academic preschools for at-risk children in France, which confirms the benefits of early intervention (Jarouse, Mingat, & Richard, 1992).

The effective preschool teacher must motivate children and be able to teach content in a way that young students stay on task. Teachers need extensive training in working with lower performing students. Organization and structure are key to program and success as well. ISLLC Standard D2.5: Professional

development is an integral part of school improvement.

Throughout his writing, Engelmann talks of the ideal program, ideal goal, and ideal community. However, we don't live in an ideal world. Many, if not all at-risk students come to the school building with a lot of social baggage, which Engelmann failed to address. The main theory is a good one, get the at-risk student identified two years prior to kindergarten and start the program so all students can be successful in learning. When it comes to educating, it is better to be proactive than reactive.

Being the instructional leader for an entire building of would-be learners is not an easy task. And Engelmann's direct instruction approach has merit with at-risk pre-schoolers but can not or should not be the only tool in the educational shed. Mary Gunter (1999) speaks to that very issue in her book Instruction: A Models Approach. Gunter (1999) points out that; "Goals are general statements of intent that reflect the needs of the learner, the societal purpose of schooling, and the subject matter to be learned. The ability to consider express, and incorporate these various goals in planning for teaching is one of the defining qualities of a professional educator." We must first decide what it is that we are going to teach the learners and then chose the appropriate instructional model, keeping in mind that all students do not learn the same way. Even though most

people are able to learn in a number of different ways, they have one or two preferences for how they like to learn or how they learn the best.

Gunter (1999) reports that Dr. Howard Gardner describes the following categories of intelligence, which can be developed in most learners to a high learning level.

1. Linguistic intelligence: Ability to use words effectively both orally and in writing.
2. Logical-mathematical intelligence: Ability to use numbers effectively.
3. Spatial intelligence: Ability to perceive and to graphically represent the visual-spatial world.
4. Bodily kinesthetic intelligence: Ability to use one's whole body to express ideas and feelings.
5. Musical intelligence: Ability to discriminate, transform, and express musical forms.
6. Interpersonal intelligence: Ability to perceive the moods, intentions, and feelings of others.
7. Intrapersonal intelligence: Ability to act on the basis of accurate self-knowledge. (p. 5)

All students must learn in more than one way in order to develop their full learning potential. students with different learning style preferences and different intelligences require many different instructional approaches. As administrators, we need to ensure that our instructional staff doesn't become deathly boring and that they continually change the instructional models and methods of instruction so students stay excited and involved in the daily lesson plan.

ISLLC Standard number three is Organizational Leadership, which tells us that a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of students by ensuring management of the organization, operations and resources

for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Perry A. Zirkel (1999) writes in his article entitled Zero Tolerance Expulsions about the legal boundaries for zero tolerance expulsions. School leaders need to be sensitive to the community's zero tolerance for threats to school safety, such as possession of drugs and weapons. They also need to avoid going overboard in handling the zero tolerance policies.

Zirkel's study was about a 12-year-old Pennsylvania boy who was observed by his classroom teacher filing his finger nails with a Swiss Army knife file. The boy was asked to hand the knife over and he did. The teacher then turned the knife over to the principal. One week later, the school district expelled him for one year, in accordance with the district's zero tolerance policy. The boy's parents filed for a judicial review and won. The youth could return to school.

There are two ways the administrators went against the ISLLC Standards. One, K3.7: "the administrator has knowledge and understanding of legal issues impacting school operations". According to Pennsylvania law, the boy was aware of the policy and the penalty for having a knife at school and he signed a copy stating such. The law states the parents must also have a copy of the zero tolerance policy sent to them and the school failed to do so. (Zirkel 1999).

Secondly, Pennsylvania zero tolerance law allows the school district the discretion to recommend or modify the policy on a case by case basis. The boy was a straight A student, a leader in chorus, and had a clean record to date. The boy's parents stated that their son had never owned a knife and that the story of him finding the knife in the hall prior to class was more than likely the truth. (Zirkel 1999). Common sense and the boy's past school history must play an important role in the judgment of the administrators in whether they expel for a full year or give the student three days off for possessing the knife, since the boy failed to turn in the found knife right away.

If the administrators in this case would have used ISLLC Standard D3.15: "effective problem framing and problem solving skills. . .", they would search out the truth before filling out the paper work. Administrators would have found the truth by talking to the parents and they could have gone as far as to ask to see the boy's room at home. The home environment can help us understand why a child acts in a certain way or what their beliefs and values are.

The school staff and administrators were following their beliefs and values. They were committed to ISLLC Standard D3.7: "a safe environment", but they lacked the knowledge and performance standards that could have solved this issue in house instead of taking it to the school board.

Theresa J. Bryant (1998) goes even several steps further with her belief that school expulsions will totally be extinct because of the adoption of the 1997 Amendments to IDEA. She also states that school officials' hands will be tied when dealing with special needs students. I argue her beliefs.

It takes the entire village to raise a child. This is a true statement, but the process starts at home with the parents. Notice, I used a "s" on the word parent. I agree with Ms. Bryant when she states "...allow a community to assume more responsibility for its youth." I believe this is easier said than done. In today's world, we have too many children having babies, too many divorced family units that use the child as a pawn in the game of tug of war, and too many parents too engaged in their lives and careers to raise a child properly.

The raising of the child begins at home. This is where the child receives its value system. Society, itself does a poor job teaching values. Once a family's values could be found on t.v, in movies, and in print. Schools at one time taught social skills, respect and problem solving. Today, it is solve your own problems and demand respect. I think I may be jaded because of my current school environment. Students demand respect but show none. I realize not all students do this but a lot do.

Let's get back to the community helping with the raising of children.

American government has always been in the business of raising children. At times we have done better than others, but we have always attempted to get more funding and that is when the village screams. I realize money is not the answer. We can attempt to model for people a different way to think and react. How will we ever change without the entire group effort from parents, school, media, state and federal government and the children wanting to change? All of us need to be on the same page. And then I think I'll call it "Utopia".

That statement that the 1997 amendments to IDEA will totally render the school systems of this great country useless is ridiculous. Okay, reality check. In the real world, rules, procedures, and structures are different for different people. The school building is no different. Discipline and consequences should be different for different students. They are not all using the same math text are they? IDEA does not say that a student who is BD and is a danger to the school cannot be consequenced. IDEA just tells us that we must educate the student in a different, more restrictive placement. The student is being consequenced just in a different manner. (IDEA 1997).

Schools need to rethink the way they operate. For example, the student who is truant is given three days off as soon as they return to school from being truant. Students do not view this as a punishment. This child has other issues

and the school can help, instead of turning them back out to the streets. My professional goal is to help change all this.

Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative Leadership, ISSLC Standard number four says that a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all staff and students by collaborating with community members and families. A collaborative administrator is one who responds to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizes community resources. As educators we can learn a lot from the corporate world.

Scott Hays' (1999) article for Workforce entitled "Our Future Requires Collaborative Leadership" really hit home. Collaboration is the leadership method that should be used in all organizations for the best results.

In Hays' article, he points out that Dr. Ronald Sims, Vice President of Human Resources at IMI Systems, an international information-technology consulting firm, is convinced that companies will need to adapt to a more collaborative style of management to succeed in the future.

Dr. Sims points out that in today's world, information is power; that with information so readily available to everyone, the hierarchical management model of pre-World War II is no longer effective. ISSLC K4.1 comes to mind,

“energizing issues and trends that potentially impact the school community”. Because every one is more knowledgeable in the community, it would be in the school’s best interest to use a collaborative model, which relies more on leadership skills than a hierarchal model, which relies more on management skills. Lead with many instead of one.

Collaboration is the ability for a group of people to work together for the mutual benefit of one goal, ISLLC P4.6 “the school and community serves one another as resources”; and ISLLC P4.10 “community stakeholders are treated equitable”. Years ago, when the computer craze hit, the educational world and schools scrambled to get community members as partners in education. These partners in education were resources for the schools because they needed the latest technology to educate their students. At the same time, large corporations would gladly be the financial providers because the schools with computer educated students were a great resource for their corporations.

The question was posed to Dr. Sims, “How can the human resource managers drive the change from the hierarchical model to the collaborative model?” (Hays 1999). In our case, how can administrators assist in that change. Dr. Sims fully agrees with ISLLC P4.15, which tells administrators to model collaboration for staff. Dr. Sims states “by acting the way they want the rest of

the organization to act. They need to start adapting collaborative means for running the human resources department. They're going to have to look for people who have the skills and knowledge to participate in a collaborative environment. Finally, they need to collaborate with the company's business leaders by figuring out how to best serve their business goals." (Hays 1999).

A wise professor once asked me, "How do we teach common sense?" I hope I was wise in responding: we don't, we model. By role modeling knowledge, skills, and values to others around us, hopefully they will become knowledgeable, practice good skills and gain values.

Ethical Leadership

Ethical Leadership is ISLLC Standard number five, the key factors of ethical leadership are discussed by J. Patrick Dobel in Public Administration Review. These factors of ethical leaders are for the leader to achieve moral self-mastery; to attend only to the context of the situation; to seek concrete outcomes. To achieve these factors, a leader must have foresight, openness to experience and reason, good timing, is able to link means to ends, deploy power, and build community. (Dobel 1998).

Self-mastery lays the groundwork for ethical leadership. Leadership is said to entail ethics because leaders have responsibilities, without responsibilities,

one cannot claim to be a leader. ISLLC Standard K5.4 states that an administrator has knowledge and understanding of professional codes and ethics. Ethics comes from having responsibilities and having self-discipline. Internal and/or external stimuli should not affect decision-making. If an administrator knows the professional codes, then decisions won't be clouded with personal bias or outside pressures.

Dobel makes virtues of a leader clear, when he states "The first dimension is finding the right mean to attain an end. The means of influence are many and varied, and the right combination of deliberation, persuasion, incentives, coercion, and authority is crucial. Misfits between means and ends will result in failure." (p.76). Good administrators have to be self-disciplined or they could abuse their power for their own purposes (ISLLC P5.7 uses the influence of the office to enhance the educational program rather than the personal gain). I believe it was Machiavelli who said power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. An administrator's actions should be based on reflection, not driven by reactive emotions and personal feelings. Personal virtues or present moral commitments can not replace laws, norms, or duties of administrative life. They do give life to your authority and decision making on a daily basis.

When it comes to building community, prudent leaders hold special

responsibilities to maintain and strengthen community foundations. ISLLC P5.11, the administrator expects the others in the school community will demonstrate integrity and exercise ethical behavior. Dobel quotes Vaclav Havel 1992, who states “The conditions of social integration, the capacity of members and groups within a society to interact peacefully, and to act with a modicum of civility and respect towards each other, cannot be controlled by leaders, but they can be influenced by example and policy”. (p. 71). Influenced by example would refer to ISLLC Standard P5.4, which tells us that an ethical leader will serve as a role model to all, not only in the school but in the community. By practicing what you preach, others will see you as a person of ethical standards. Influenced by policy would refer to ISLLC P5.13, which tells us that an ethical leader will apply laws and procedures fairly, wisely, and considerable.

Dr. Petra E. Snowden (2002), reflects on what Ernest Boyer wrote in his paper “Making a Commitment to Character”. “Boyer believes that schools not only have the obligation to guide students into becoming literate and well informed but also to ‘help them develop the capacity to live responsibly and to judge wisely in matters of life and conduct’. He sees the crucial problem, as deciding which values should be taught within the diversity of today’s society. He concludes that the following core of virtues might be agreed upon: honesty,

respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, perseverance, and giving. A school's greatest impact occurs not in the formal lessons taught but in creating a climate in which virtues are learned by example."

An ethical leader must account for each and every aspect of all decisions being made so they can live up to the part of their ethical responsibilities as a leader. One must also lead by example so others will follow. Reality is, that good intentions alone will not pave the way for school /or community building. One must know how to wield and deploy one's power.

Political Leadership

Political Leadership is the sixth and final ISLLC Standard. Brian J. Cook (1998) points out the essential fact of politics and government and explores its implications for public management. He discusses whether a political standard should be applied for public administrator's education, professional development and practice.

Cook maintains that public administrators "through internal collective processes of their own, as well as participation in external processes, administrative agencies help to decide what goals a nation, a state or province, or a locality should pursue and what values should be upheld or disparaged". (p. 225). A local school system, for example, which has just been in the national

spotlight for a devastating violent act adopts new safety policies. The new local safety policies creates a national chain reaction, and that in effect, creates state policies and eventually national policies which will affect all local school systems nation wide. This relates to ISLLC Standard K6.1, which states “the administrator has knowledge and understanding of principles of representative governance that undergrid, the system of American schools.”

ISLLC Standard D6.2, which states “the administrator believes in, values, and is committed to recognizing a variety of ideas, values, and cultures”. Cook points out that public administration both colors and is colored by all other aspects of local society and culture as well as the societal and cultural aspects of the entire nation. Therefore, when making decisions, there may be more than one right answer (p. 226).

Cook points out the theory that runs through the ISLLC Standards as well as modern day organizations, “What government agencies do in a formative sense comes about as a result mostly of collective processes, rather than the individual initiative of any particular manager, organizational leader, or technical professional. But individuals can influence those collective processes. that character and extent of that influence depends on how administrators define their roles and what perspectives they have on their jobs.” (p. 227). These statements

relate well to ISLLC Standard P6.2, “communication occurs among school community concerning trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which the school operates”. Collaboration and teamwork is a must for policies that affect so many. Without relationships, good team decisions can be made but they more than likely will not be enforced or followed through on by the team.

According to Cook, all public officials, whether elected or not, are engaged in both instrumental and constructive endeavors, whether they realize it or not. (p. 226). As an administrator you better be able to be political in the game of politics. Administrators that may not see themselves as political leaders will have a rude awakening if not prepared for the local scrutiny that may occur on that first major decision, which turns out to affect the entire community and/or the state.

The ISLLC Standards are not only great educational tools but also great words to live by as a parent and a citizen. As I have researched this paper, I realize I live many of these ISLLC Standards in my daily life as an educator and parent.

Douglas B. Reeves (2001), describes President Bush’s educational reform plan as involving good leaders under the ISLLC Standards in the classrooms. Reeves talks about new administrators being hired for not only their knowledge

but on their ability to get the job done. As an administrator, you cannot just talk the talk; you have to walk the talk. Ellioitt Aronson (2000), talks about creating positive school cultures and climates where students and teachers are taught compassion. They are expected to carry this compassion over into their daily lives within the school setting and the community. Administrators need to have the ability to walk the talk to get this firmly established within their buildings. Aronson quotes Hillel: “Those who do not increase knowledge decrease knowledge. But don’t mistake knowledge for talk. One who knows, acts knowingly. Fools talk, and their talk often fools.” (p. 169). As I go forth in my role as an administrator, this philosophy will be how I act to serve my building and community. After all, behavior equals values.

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