ISSL standards: tools for an effective educational leader

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ISSL standards: tools for an effective educational leader

Abstract
The Iowa Standards for School Leadership (ISSL) provide an educational leader with the essential tools to construct a strong educational structure. These tools are used to actively engage everyone in the building process. The six ISSL Standards: Visionary, Instructional, Organizational, Collaborative, Ethical, and Political Leadership, serve as a blueprint to gain knowledge and develop attributes appropriate to the role of a building principal.

This essay reflects on how I have incorporated the ISSL Standards into my role as educator and future administrator. The practicum experiences, course-related work, and visionary expectations have allowed me to understand the importance of being an effective leader. Throughout the two years of my education, I have experienced many new opportunities to utilize the ISSL Standards, which enriched my administrative abilities and maximized my success as a building administrator.

Keywords
School administrators—Attitudes; Teacher-administrator relationships; Student-administrator relationships;

Disciplines
Educational Leadership | Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration

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ISSL STANDARDS: TOOLS FOR AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL LEADER
A REFLECTIVE RESEARCH ESSAY

A Reflective Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling
And Postsecondary Education
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Master of Arts in Education

By
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A REFLECTIVE RESEARCH ESSAY

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The Iowa Standards for School Leadership (ISSL) provide an educational leader with the essential tools to construct a strong educational structure. These tools are used to actively engage everyone in the building process. The six ISSL Standards: Visionary, Instructional, Organizational, Collaborative, Ethical, and Political Leadership, serve as a blueprint to gain knowledge and develop attributes appropriate to the role of a building principal.

The characteristics that each standard entails are essential for a thriving educational environment. Visionary leadership guides the educational community in an optimistic approach to achieve higher expectations. Providing each student with a nurturing and enriching education is done through instructional leadership. Organizational leadership manages the daily operations that ensure a safe learning environment. Staff, families, and community members are invited to work together for the good of all students when utilizing collaborative leadership. Ethical leadership values the diversity of students with integrity and fairness; while political leadership models the need for all students to understand and appreciate the role they play in society. Understanding and integrating the attributes of each standard is essential for a building administrator to become a true leader.

This essay reflects on how I have incorporated the ISSL Standards into my role as educator and future administrator. The practicum experiences, course-related work, and visionary expectations have allowed me to understand the importance of being an effective leader. Throughout the two years of my education, I have experienced many new opportunities to utilize the ISSL Standards, which enriched my administrative abilities and maximized my success as a building administrator.
My Philosophy of Education

I believe that an educational leader values our culturally diverse society and dedicated to providing a quality education through experiences that develop an awareness and appreciation for the ambitions, beliefs, and achievements of all people. As educators, our responsibility is to establish and maintain an atmosphere in which students, staff, and community members collaboratively create a challenging learning environment aimed to respect and enrich the skills needed for our youth to become lifelong learners.

Iowa Standards for School Leadership

Visionary Leadership

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Visionary leadership is the backbone in every school district, whether large or small, that can progressively improve the educational structure through the 21st century. Reflecting on the past, recognizing the present, and envisioning the future provides administrators with the essential tools to construct a foundation for a stronger educational setting. Recognizing and admitting weaknesses, from both past and present learning approaches, is essential before improvement strategies can be developed that concentrate on a vision the entire school community shares.

The journal article I critiqued modeled a true visionary leader. "No Bluff to His Cutting Edge Innovations" (Goldman 1998) features small town superintendent, Robert G. Rogers, from Bluff, Ill. Rogers visualized how his district with limited human and financial
resource could integrate technology into the academic lives of its students. His business-education approach brought the community on board to volunteer their expertise and support. With the community's financial support, Rogers began to incorporate technology into the original curriculum and brought a world of wonder to a small town. Within two years time, his students were taking advanced placement classes, learning from a classroom halfway across the world, and opening up the technology center to parents and families at night. Community members were encouraged with every aspect of the program and funding for future developments grew each year. Mr. Rogers did not let his small town's financial woes limit his vision in bringing a world of learning opportunities that led to a more encouraging school. He is truly a visionary leader that many administrators and educators can use as a role model.

Waterloo middle schools were also encouraged when they were invited to participate in a collaborative role with the 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant at the four middle schools. The goal of this federally funded grant is "to enhance students' academic achievement while promoting the development of personal competencies and deterring risk taking behaviors including drug use, alcohol use, and violence." As a community learning center, each school serves middle school students and their families by assessing the needs of the youth in their school community and deterring the most effective activities and strategies that address those needs.

Another visionary leader, Dr. Arlis Swartzendruber, superintendent of Waterloo Community Schools, unveiled a statewide vision titled, "Redefinition of High School: A Vision for Iowa" (Members Districts of the Urban Education Network of Iowa, April 2001), during an interview I conducted with him on October 10, 2001. The Urban Education Network (UEN) defines vision as: "the dream for the future of the organization and the path taken to make it a
reality” (P.21). Everyone in the organization must understand it and believe in it. It must become their vision as well as the organization’s vision. The vision of UEN is to reduce the number of youth being inadequately served in ineffective high schools and maximum students’ preparation for graduation and life beyond high school. The working document states that schools must personalize education and engage students in significant ways that enhance optimal achievement. This ensures that no student feels excluded or “invisible.” Encompassing a feeling of community between Iowa schools is an example of visionary leadership shared by administrators and educators statewide. By sharing this common vision, schools within the UEN can create a support system by sharing the strategies and progress throughout the state of Iowa.

I have witnessed UEN educational vision in the 21st Century Community Learning Center after school program in the middle schools throughout Waterloo. I have been privileged to assist with the administrative aspect of the program and encouraged with the 80 plus students who attend nightly with great enthusiasm. This program, which is strongly supported by the community, will center on offering students a wide range of new hands-on opportunities and community building activities. Offering experiences that make schools more personable on a variety of levels are the foundation for building a true sense of community within a school. This will continue through high school with the refining of Iowa high school structure.

My practicum also included an excellent opportunity to write a vision statement for 2002-2003 school year as part of the Middle School Steering Committee. The objective of this committee was to research the needs of the students at Central Middle School and define a school-wide vision statement for the 2002-2003 school year. By utilizing the expertise of authors, Cunningham and Cordero (2000), from their book, Educational Administration: A Problem Based Approach, I focused this task on their belief that ideas and knowledge from work
of others serve as a catalyst for thinking through classroom and school improvements. Listening and communicating ideas and thoughts from all stakeholders played a large role in writing a vision statement that would set the tone for implementing the school improvement plan the following school year. This was essential in developing a vision that was collaborated by teachers, students, and parents. Combining the thoughts and ideas of all stakeholders resulted in the shared vision statement: Central Middle School is a place which focuses on the adolescent and nurtures their development to become responsible citizens who will be lifelong learners dedicated to active participation in an interdependent global society.

Authors, Carter and Cummingham (1997), stressed in their book, An American School Superintendent: Leading in an age of Pressure, ideas that have strong promise for a particular school will need to be discussed, experimented with, and assessed. In this way, educators are working together by testing and sharing ideas to better meet the needs of a changing population of students, increased economic and social pressures, advancing technology, and the demands of an uncertain future. Those participating in the improvement of schools will need to orient their common efforts toward a shared vision of improvement as they develop creative insights, invent new schools, and prepare all students for life in a knowledgable society (P.68).

I experienced this through my leadership practicum by being a member of the Assessment Committee at Central Middle School. The first step in developing the new school improvement plan was to measure where the students at Central currently are in achieving the expectations set the year before. The core of the data was the newly received results from the 2001 Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). This committee measured the progress of the current school improvement plan, analyzed the 2001 ITBS results, and reviewed strengths made with the current plan and weaknesses that needed to be addressed in future plans. The committee drafted
an outline for the 2002-2003 school year, which included strategies that would fill the gaps of the current plan. This first draft of the school improvement plan was introduced to teachers in subject workshops, facilitated by other committee members and myself, to discuss and analyze how the reported weaknesses can be addressed. The ideas and strategies received from teachers were used by the Assessment Committee to revise and develop a school improvement plan that reflected a shared vision. Central Middle School teachers, district curriculum directors and administrators approved the final plan. The newly implemented school improvement plan will be closely monitored during the 2002-2003 school year. I will continue to monitor the progress in student achievement based on the goals and objectives in the 2002-2003 school improvement plan.

All the experiences I have encountered throughout my course work have allowed me to focus on how a vision can become a reality that reflects on the whole school and not just a single classroom. I have become a more optimistic educator and more determined future administrator. Through the course work and practicum experience, I have learned that leadership becomes a matter of how to be rather than how to do. Throughout my practicum I have focused on becoming an effective visionary leader that will empower the lives of my students, parents, and colleagues.

**Instructional Leadership**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture.

Within the past decade, the cultures within Iowa classrooms have become more diverse. Recognizing and appreciating the diversity of a school creates the foundation for school leaders
to become culturally responsive. This is especially important when developing a curriculum that meets the needs of each student in their school’s population.

Significant leadership decisions that have the potential to impact student learning, such as staff development, should be initiated at the school level to meet the needs of the individual school’s diversity. The journal article, “Learning To Lead, Leading To Learn” (Holmes 2000), affirms that the Educational Leadership called for a nationwide effort to recruit, train, and retrain school leaders with instructional, community and visionary leadership who have the ability to rally partners around a common goal to raising students achievement. This is beginning an overhaul in principal preparation and professional development to make instructional leadership the day-to-day work of a school leader.

The shift from a traditional educational manager to an effective instructional leader can be seen at Central Middle School with administrators, Mr. Tyson and Mrs. Padget. During our interview, they shared new implementations being designed for all school administrators. Daily walk-throughs in classrooms allow for administrators to be more visible while surveying what is being taught in the classrooms. The importance of recognizing the climate and diversity of the building can also be assessed during this time, which both administrators believe is one of the most important duties of an administrator. They develop staff development opportunities based on creating and nourishing a vision with a specific direction and focus on the diversities of the school’s population to improve student achievement. Mr. Tyson and Mrs. Padget are respected administrators with a clear vision, charisma, and decisive leadership that enables their staff to strive toward a common goal.

My practicum experience as principal designee gave me valuable experience in gaining an understanding of the climate of the building. This opportunity allowed me to confront and
resolve discipline issues, evaluate classrooms during teacher walk-throughs, and supervise students during a variety of activities. I thought the role of disciplinarian would prove to be hardest, but it proved to be the most encouraging. After reading Payne (2001), *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, I am striving to handle discipline in a positive manner. Payne stresses throughout her book that discipline, which occurs when a student uses the inappropriate behavior, should be a time for instruction in appropriate behavior. Most students know they did something wrong and it is redundant to tell them so. Measuring the positive aspects of the students to the negative behaviors can help in discussing ways of avoiding future problems. This positive mode of discipline has helped students and parent become more receptive to consequences for their actions. I hope to continue this positive form of discipline in my role as an instructional leader to build a positive rapport with students and parents while supporting my teachers and support staff.

To increase this rapport with parents and students, I focused much of my attention on increasing parental participation throughout my practicum. I assisted in the planning of Central Middle School's First Family Reading Night that was held October 16, 2001. Parents were given surveys at the beginning of the year to increase parental involvement, and results indicated a desire for a family-friendly night: Free books, pizza, entertainment, and early hours were priorities in making this night a success. We were optimistically expecting approximately 20-30 families would attend. When the night arrived, we were shocked that over 400 people attended Family Reading Night and it was a huge success. The cost of the night was ten times what was budgeted but it was worth every penny to see families reading together. This positive experience also paid off three weeks later when we had 80% attendance at parent teacher conferences,
compared to 60% from previous years. Central will continue to offer families a variety of positive experiences at our school, with an emphasis on improving student achievement.

The most successful parent participation efforts are those that offer parents a variety of roles in the context of a well organized and long-lasting program. Parents need to be able to choose from a wide range of activities, which accommodate different schedules, preferences, and capabilities. As part of the planning process, teachers and administrators will need to assess their own readiness for involving parents and determine how they wish to engage and utilize them. Joyce Epstein (2000) believes that only with outstanding support will all teachers, students, parents, community members and others remain committed to improving schools, classrooms, and children’s learning. This support is especially necessary for developing comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

Focusing my practicum experiences on how Instructional Leadership can impact my leadership skills and learning from my own practices will enrich my abilities as an administrator. It is my vision to be an Instructional Leader that is respected for the educational support and background that I bring to the role of principal.

Organizational Leadership

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

A school administrator is responsible for a variety of operations and roles within a school setting. A day in the life of a principal can be: defining a school’s vision and mission, managing curriculum and instruction, promoting a positive climate, fostering a healthy school-community relationship, promoting high expectations, and managing fiscal resources, while contributing to
the overall effectiveness of the school. Even though it is just a partial list of daily responsibilities, it vividly paints a portrait of the high expectations that are held for principals. A school administrator is expected to be an organizational leader.

The journal article, “Leadership Skills in Schools and Business” (Stronge 1998), compared the similarities in the organizational leadership between corporate and educational leaders. Honesty, competence, goal setting, and inspiration were ranked consistently as the most important qualities seen in an organizational leader, regardless of a corporate or academic setting. The knowledge of how to organize and delegate to accomplish the task at hand, visualizing changes while inspiring a shared vision with everyone participating, and the ability to effectively work with others in a morally enriched setting are the keys to building a more productive work environment.

I applied my organizational leadership skills while serving as team leader for my 7th grade team during the 2001-2002 school year. Meetings were held after school every Monday and involved teacher representatives from each of the grade level teams and exploratory departments. These meetings provided opportunities to address issue of concern with the building administrators and relate that information back to the individual teams. This group dealt with multiple issues including school safety, student achievement, parental involvement, and we also reviewed district policy and procedural information. Being a team leader gave me insight into organizational proceedings that were involved in operating an effective school.

I found that the most useable organizational practicum activity I completed this year was the development of a principal’s calendar. This task was based on book, The High School Principal’s Calendar: A Month-By-Month Planner for the School Year (Ricken, Simon, and Terc 2000), which catalogued activities, key tasks, communications list, planning lists, and personnel
responsibilities that principals should address each month of the year. This activity introduced me to the importance of time management. While completing my school year calendar and task lists, I envisioned the details that would be involved in successfully completing each task. This practicum activity made me more knowledgeable to the wide range of administrator duties and the importance of developing a routine that will accomplish all tasks in a timely and organized manner.

One of the tasks that an administrator faces each year is student scheduling. I had the opportunity to work with my mentor, Marla Padget, to schedule the incoming sixth graders for the new school year. After building a school master schedule, the district program, AS400, computes student schedules and class sizes for those students who do not partake in any extracurricular or special classes. Those students who need special classes required hand written schedules and then entered into the system. This needs to occur before other students can be automatically enrolled into classes. The sixty-plus man-hours that was required to accomplish this routine task was indispensable as I look forward to next school year and the possibility of having this responsibility as an administrator in charge of scheduling. When dealing with over 800 students who are required to have seven class periods per day, organization is key to ensure each schedule is correct.

Through my practicum experiences I have found the organizational skills needed in the job of a school principal to be innumerable. Mr. Tyson, building principal, gave me valuable advice the first day I assisted in administrative duties, which was to stay calm, cool, and collected even under the most difficult of circumstances. Events that are unexpected such as dealing with discipline, calming an upset parent, dealing with a staff conflict, or an unexpected visit from the superintendent can all happen before the first bell rings. Possessing emotional
control sets a positive tone for the entire school by staying calm and positive, even when under stress. The most effective organizational leaders expect the unexpected.

**Collaborative Leadership**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

The most effective collaborative leaders develop and strengthen those people with whom they work while building competence, capacity, and confidence in others. Creating a support system where teachers can share new ideas and successful experiences throughout the school day is the first step in initiating teamwork in the educational setting. Focusing staff meetings on collaborating activities can create an educational bandwagon that will gain more support than the traditional lecture and listen meetings.

Effective school leaders help to create a collaborative culture that enables teachers to work together, engaged in collective inquiry and learn each others’ experiences. This is supported in the journal article, “The Superintendent as Staff Developer” (DuFour 2000). This article reinforces the debate that the development of a structure and culture that encourages learning is the primary task of leadership and perhaps the only way a leader can genuinely influence and inspire others. One good idea developed by one teacher can benefit an entire class, team, department, or the whole school. Utilizing the years of experience and knowledge that administrators have on staff can be the most unproblematic approach to planning weekly staff development activities and implementing school-wide changes.

I have learned through assigned coursework that the success of any change is dependent not only on what the change facilitators do, but also on how the participants individually and
collectively interpret and understand these actions and events. Hall and Hord (2001) believe success in facilitating change depends on one’s ability to detect problems and resistance early in the conception. Change facilitators who are quick to see the overall pattern and themes of both positive and negative problems or resistance can then take immediate action aimed at their totality, rather than target individual actions.

I have had the privilege the past three years to be part of a change facilitator team at Central Middle School. We have developed a variety of interdisciplinary units to use in our fully implemented block scheduling that was created during our team planning. We have developed activities that an individual teacher would not undertake alone but as a team player. Working as a team has led to more hands-on learning opportunities that allow students to flourish because of the coordinated efforts of their teachers. This implementation would not have been possible without a flexible and trusting administrator who was willing to let a team of teachers try a new way of learning. Our collaboration served as a model for other teams at Central and will grow as others work together to implement new innovations and ideas.

Next year, I will use the collaborative concepts of the authors, Teel and Debruin-Paracki (2001), described in their book, Making Schools Count: Promoting Urban Student Motivation and Success. These two educators developed a four-year project that focused on motivating all students in the urban classroom to work at their highest potential. Their collaborative effort concluded that, “All teachers should celebrate their students’ diverse strengths, talents, and cultural backgrounds in various ways in their classroom approach, in order to validate their students and in doing so promote their success.” (P.101) This quote, I believe, reflects the needs for diverse learning opportunities within our public education setting. I will collaborate with other staff members to develop a curriculum that appreciates the diversity of all the students at
Central Middle School. It is my hope that this will become a pilot program for all grade levels. This experience has made me realize that Collaborative Leadership encompasses a wider range than only teachers and support staff. A true Collaborative Leader involves teachers, support staff, students, parents, and community members in developing a fellowship to enrich the education of every student.

My practicum experience in Collaborative Leadership has included being a staff representative of the Partners in Education Committee. I facilitated many projects during my two-year practicum such as Career Day, Partner in Education Fair, Jet Toy Interdisciplinary Project, and Student of the Month celebrations. These projects were a collaborative effort between the partners, staff, and students. It was enlightening to see unreachable projects come to life with the help of external stakeholders. Utilizing these outside resources within the community has brought new experiences to the students at Central Middle School. Collaborating fresh and exciting ways to support education with a group of community members is encouraging for the future of Waterloo Community Schools.

**Ethical Leadership**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. As educational leaders search daily to identify the reconstruction of society and to learn effective ways to deal with changing populations of students, they find themselves faced with the fundamental questions about equity, freedom, and character. Before an administrator can provide ethical leadership they must know their own values, those in their community, and how their ethical standards guide them in the decision making process.
The journal article, “Preparing Leaders for Ethical Decisions” (Czaja & Lowe 2000), discusses why the renewed interest in teaching ethics in principal preparation programs has grown over the past decade. Preparation programs should focus on helping students articulate a set of values and beliefs to guide their actions and problem solving. Prioritization of values and a practiced ability to apply those values in a daily leadership setting are recognized as a set of essential knowledge and skills for an effective ethical leader.

Aronson (2000) in his book, Nobody Left to Hate, give educators clear, specific, and practical strategies that can build a sense of community in every educational environment. It is Aronson’s scientific conclusion that students lash out because they feel isolated and not an active participant in the educational setting. Students can develop an ethical appreciation of other students’ qualities through cooperative learning activities and community building exercises. As an administrator, I will utilize the real-life school situations in Aronson’s book for staff development activities that promote a non-threatening and inviting learning environment for every student.

Cohen (1999) believes a school's climate can be a positive influence on or a significant barrier to learning and includes all the aspects of a school's environment that have the potential to influence the learning, discipline, and morale of those who work and study there. The elements that make up any school's climate are complex but include the quality of interactions among students and adults with a high level of safety and respect that all stakeholders feel. The ongoing challenge principals and other educators face is to identify steps for enhancing school culture and the conditions under which students can learn more, educators can teach better, and everyone can feel welcomed and respected.
Creating a learning environment that respects the diversity of the school is a reflection of the hidden rule theory of Ruby Payne (2001). Payne describes the hidden rules that govern how people behave in our social class. Those rules, because they are hidden and known within each social class, many times serve as stumbling blocks for those individuals who are trying to improve their social class. Having the knowledge of the hidden rules that affect a student’s behavior and academic performance has enabled me to be a more understanding and compassionate administrator.

In my practicum experience, dealing with discipline referrals has led me to reflect on my own respected values and ethical standards. Weighing the circumstances behind the infraction to the students’ understanding of their own moral and values is essential in making a fair and ethical decision. Becoming aware of the ethical differences in students has taught me that there is more than one way to solve a conflict. I am looking forward to growing through my practicum experience with valued and well-respected mentors, Mr. Robert Tyson and Mrs. Marla Padget, who both apply self-values in their daily practices. In my final stages of administrative preparation at the University of Northern Iowa, I will continue to build a firm foundation for establishing a code of ethics in which to make decisions that affect all stakeholders. This will also help develop an effective ethical awareness to take a more professional approach to administrative decision-making.

**Political Leadership**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. The value of knowing and practicing the policies and procedures put in place within a district can make or break a building administrator. An effective principal
understands the importance of context in their job performance. They understand their values, skills, and knowledge, while focusing on what is in the best interest of their students.

The journal article I analyzed, “Portrait of an Ideal Principal: Context and Self” (Hausman, Crow & Sperry 2000), identified the three things that effective principals do: understand the context, understand themselves, and focus on what is in the best interest of the students. The article argues that the most ideal principals are carefully selected for their assignments and not just moved on a whim. They must be politically aware of the school’s socioeconomic status, be prepared to adjust their leadership styles with their new surroundings, and be ethically grounded. Ideal principals must see themselves more as negotiators of the environment and less as managers of the school system.

During my interview with Dr. Arlis Swartzendruber, he stressed the importance of knowing the policies and procedures that are developed for every district. His most valuable piece of advice was to “always go by policy.” Practicing this advice daily in administrative decision making eliminates the accusations of being biased. Fairness is of the utmost importance as an administrator, but the culture and socioeconomic status of the school is a very important aspect that cannot be overlooked. The student will be given the best chance to succeed with an education and rule system specifically tailored to them, so their lifestyle is not a hindrance but an attribute.

Educational leaders must attempt to keep abreast of changes based on judicial decisions, state laws, congressional acts, and other government factors. This is especially important in the education of special needs students. Under federal law, every child is entitled to a free and appropriate public education. The new requirements for education of students with disabilities, especially within the regular education environment, place demands on school principals and
staff members. Special education experts, Bartlett, Weinstein, and Etcheidt (2002), stress the three most important laws that directly govern the education of children with disabilities are: the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the American Disabilities Act. A major component of all three federal statutes related to the education of children with disabilities is the requirement that these students must be educated, to the maximum extent appropriate, with children who do not have disabilities. It is the responsibility of the building principal, teachers, and local area education agencies to enforce this right to all students while following the district policy and procedures.

I gained valuable knowledge of the policy and procedures of the Waterloo Community School District while reviewing the 2001-2002 Parent & Student Policy Handbook distributed to every family that has a child attending school in the district. The forty-two pages of this handbook contain the policies adopted by the Board of Education and the accompanying regulations that are relevant to every stakeholder in the educational setting. As a future administrator, this handbook gave me a clear understanding of what the Waterloo Community School’s policies consist of, how they are administered, and the rights and responsibilities parents and students have regarding education. This is one piece of vital information that should always be at the fingertips of every administrator to ensure that policy and procedures are followed and no repercussions are felt in the future.

Reflecting on my coursework and practicum experience, the Iowa Standards for School Leadership have guided me through the responsibilities and duties of an effective educational leader. The six ISSL Standards: Visionary, Instructional, Organizational, Collaborative, Ethical, and Political Leadership, provided me with a foundation to continue to promoting the framework
of attributes that enriched my capabilities as a building principal. I believe the foundation that I have built is sturdy enough to support the changes and challenges ahead of me in my role of administrator.

During my practicum experiences, I found that a great number of administrative duties are multifaceted and one task may not fit just one ISSL Standard, but a combination of many. The more components of the ISSL Standards that can be incorporated, the stronger the effect will be on the school, society, and culture. This will create an educational environment with more support, which creates success, due to the variety of effective leadership skills of an administrator.

Continuing my duties as a principal designee have made me become more optimistic, engaged, and knowledgeable in the visionary building process at Central Middle School. It has also provided me with the means for immediate application of the education and skills I am receiving through my current coursework. Throughout my practicum, I was inspired in seeing first hand the responsibilities behind the smooth daily operations, the balancing act of time management, and the importance of teamwork by some of the most effective organizational leaders in the Waterloo School District. Collaborative efforts between community members, staff, and administrators through the Partners in Education Program thrive with an effective leader. My studies in ethical leadership allowed me to recognize how morals and values of administrators and students affect the fairness of individual student issues. The political and legal issues that can arise in a conflict have confirmed Dr. Swartzendruber’s advice to me, “Always go with the policy.” This valuable advice will sanction the administrative decisions I make and my overall abilities as a political leader.
The challenges that I have faced as an educator the past ten years have taught me the importance of diversity and that there is not just one answer to any situation. Using my respect for diversity and the importance of communication will be strong attributes I can bring to my role as an administrator. By modeling the importance of communication between staff, parents, and students, I believe I can be an administrator that can develop new ideas both at school and at home.

In my future role as administrator, my priority will be to ensure each student is taught the value of self-worth and respected for their individual diversities. Students who have high self-esteem and appreciate their individuality strive to reach the higher expectations that are needed in the public schools. Positive attitudes follow the students from home into the classroom. Developing and implementing character education in all grade levels would be a staff development goal that each teacher would benefit from. Staff members also need to know the value of self-worth and that everyone’s dedication is noticed and respected. Creating a support system that is cohesive with the needs of the school’s population will reinforce the value of self-worth and self-achievement.

My platform on education in my role of administrator is a dedication to create a public school that enriches the lives of all stakeholders. Positive leadership is essential for this significant goal. I believe that I possess the characteristics to lead staff and students towards a safe and welcoming environment, which will accelerate the learning of every student. I believe my strongest attribute is the ability to bring out the best in people through a compassionate, dedicated, and encouraging approach. I have learned to value and grow from these personal qualities, which have led me to fulfill my dream of becoming an administrator.
I believe the road to success is always under construction. The Iowa Standards for School Leadership will provide a strong foundation for building a promising and successful career in educational administration. By applying these standards in my administrative practices, it is my personal and professional goal that a truly well rounded leader will emerge, one that can balance the demands and responsibilities to give my students the best possible public education.
References


