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A voice for our children : what I believe about leadership and education

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Abstract

Leadership in education will be a challenging job. The leader of a school must maintain a level of self-awareness in order to run an effective building. This level of awareness must continuously reflect upon, "Have I raised student achievement?" and "Have I created a successful educational experience for my students?" Educational leaders also need to create culture, manage the daily operations of the school, collaborate with families and community members, act with integrity and fairness, and be knowledgeable of political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

LEADERSHIP – A VOICE FOR OUR CHILDREN:
WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION

A Research Paper

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and Postsecondary Education
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by

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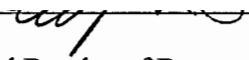
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Leadership in education will be a challenging job. The leader of a school must maintain a level of self-awareness in order to run an effective building. This level of awareness must continuously reflect upon, "Have I raised student achievement?" and "Have I created a successful educational experience for my students?" I would not be successful in my career today had I not continued to pursue my dreams and aspirations through my own metacognition. I know I would not be where I am today had I not continued to work toward my personal goals that focused on philosophies and beliefs about education. The reasons why I became an educator, what I believe about education, why I decided to join the educational leadership program, and what I have always believed about leadership, encompass all the choices that I have made and the reasons why I feel I would be a successful school leader.

The reasons why I decided to become an educator have all surrounded my love and passion to help children grow and learn. Although it may sound cliché, I knew at an early age that I wanted to be an educator. I grew up in a large family and love the way each one of us was unique and, oddly enough, respected my siblings for their individualities. I would spend my free time during summer vacations playing school with my brothers and sisters, and even the neighborhood children; I was always a teacher. I have had a consistent desire to encourage others to respect all learners, regardless of their economic background or nay learning disabilities that may have existed. A young

girl in my neighborhood had a learning disability and I always believed that through hard work and determination the world of education should hold equal opportunities for her. I helped her reach her goal to graduate from high school by tutoring her during those years. This continued passion followed through during my college experience where I sought a degree in secondary education and English.

My personal experiences have also helped shape my desire to become an educator. As a child, I had some great experiences with my education. I had teachers who taught with style and made class enjoyable while maintaining a “teachable” environment. I also had some teachers during my grade school and high school years who were not great educators. Many times I had wondered whether or not they even liked children. My personal experiences in the classroom made me want to emulate those great educators, and work toward helping those who weren’t great, want to become better. One way to help improve teachers is to become a school leader.

My personal accomplishments have aided in my pursuit to become an educational leader. I have always enjoyed school and my grades in high school and college were evident of that. I loved what school had to offer; knowledge, friendships, mentors, and challenges. Throughout my experiences as an educator, thus far, I have had many opportunities and experiences to lead. I had the opportunity to lead when I was selected to partake in a reading committee my first year of teaching. Representing

my school and learning about the importance of reading in the classroom for student achievement gave me the skills to run several professional development days for staff members. I also worked on a committee whose main goal was to create activities for professional development time. I have had the opportunity to lead as a neighborhood leader in my school building. This job required that I, along with seven other staff members, met with the principal and got messages and announcements, and then related this information back to the staff during morning meetings. I have also taken on responsibilities within the English department. I am a representative for DEA, and have collected money and organized fund-raisers for several organizations, such as breast cancer awareness. These experiences have given me the opportunity to taste leadership, as well as build personal connections and friendships with members of the community that I would not have otherwise. My accomplishments as an educator have also given me the confidence that I will need to make some tough decisions as a school leader.

My personal beliefs have driven me to continue my educational journey as I pursued a master's degree in the principalship program. Education should not discriminate; therefore, it should not identify its ability to educate a person based upon his or her race, sex, income, or level of ability. Education is a gift that, as Americans, we have a right to receive. I have always believed that an equal education should be offered to all students. I think that students whose ability level may be lower than

the average student's ability should not feel as if he or she does not have the same opportunities. Nor should he or she feel as if participation in school activities was limited. I believe that a building filled with equity will create a successful learning experience. I also believe that the leader of a school must maintain an active role in leading the classroom environment, the curriculum, the educators, the community, and the students.

The beliefs that I hold in education have had an intense effect upon my decision to join the leadership program. A school should offer an excellent educational experience and the only way I could make certain this happens is by becoming a leader and role model for students, staff, and the community. Although education's primary focus is based on student achievement levels, one must not forget about the importance of using resources that are part of creating a successful learning environment for students. Establishing relationships and making outside connections with families and community members can have a huge impact on student learning. Teacher and student accountability should always be monitored as well. Teachers who are in the classroom should be motivated to teach students and I want to find a way to do that. The leadership program has helped to fulfill all my beliefs and personal goals regarding an educational experience.

The educational needs that exist today have driven my personal motivation to lead. The book, *Principal Leadership* (Wilmore, 2002),

offered information regarding standards, each possessing qualities that a good leader should develop. Education and a successful educational experience can only happen if educators are willing to take the extra step to promote the success of all students. How can we do this? By taking down the walls and barriers that separate students by their looks, their race, and their abilities – I can start this journey as a school leader. The development of personal relationships will also help build communication that exists between home, school, and the community – thus help to raise student achievement.

I believe effective education can only be achieved through successful leadership. My beliefs about leadership closely shadow the guidelines and standards that have been developed for educational leaders in the book, *Principal Leadership* (Wilmore, 2002). I think it is very important that a school's leader has established high standards and expectations for teachers and the students when it comes to work habits and student achievement. Student achievement can only happen if everyone works together. The six standards for effective leadership have been created with this idea in mind. School leaders should be ready and willing to accept many duties. These duties are challenging, but success can be created when leaders have a clear vision. Schools need to have visionary leaders in order to have effective education. Visionary leaders should have well-thought out plans for success and also need to map out a goal that details how to attain it. Educational leaders also need to create

culture, manage the daily operations of the school, collaborate with families and community members, act with integrity and fairness, and be knowledgeable of political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. Throughout experience, training, and a personal belief for how to most effectively lead a school through change, I think I am on my way to becoming a great leader in education.

As anyone could easily see, I am motivated to lead for many reasons. At the heart of my motivation are the students. I believe that our students deserve a good leader, a leader who has worked in the trenches for students and will continue to fight for their “best” educational experience possible. An effective leader is also a leader who makes certain that the teachers have challenged students with educational materials that were relevant to the curriculum. With this idea in mind, I think it is pertinent that ample time has been spent developing the curriculum that followed state standards and guidelines, while still giving focused efforts to the needs of the students.

My personal needs also underlie my motivation to lead. My personal needs include working hard for students and helping them achieve goals they may have for themselves. I think when we have the ability to create our own set of goals and values, all of the sudden we tend to take ownership of what we do. My personal needs to lead also coincide with my personal needs in life. As a leader, I hope to accomplish leadership in a school that respects all learners. I hope to be a role model

that my employees will respect and I hope to be an effective leader by having focused efforts on students; the equality and belief in their successes. I can only become an exemplary leader if I have the correct training, a belief in the school system, and a personal drive from within myself. I am willing to make the personal commitment and work toward a better future in education.

A future administrator has many duties and responsibilities to community members, parents, staff, and students. The role as a school leader must be taken seriously. In order to best serve a school as its leader, one of the most important ways to be successful is to continuously *reflect for action*. Reflecting for action should be looked at in four different categories. The first step is to reflect upon becoming the leader of learning. This role would encompass the school leader's responsibility to be the conductor between parents, students, and staff members. This also means the principal must be the school's link to members of society, and she must also be the creator and maintainer of the school's culture. Another step for a reflective leader is to stay involved in educational change. Educational change can be monitored and shared with staff members through professional development, maintaining relationships with staff members, and staying on top of educational trends in other school throughout the country. Another role as a school leader is to reflect and act upon the improvement for learning for students and adults. The leader must be the leader of change, thus allowing school

improvement to occur. The last area that one must examine to be an effective and reflective leader is to become the leader of service for the school. One must service the special education programs, teachers, the community, and extra-curricular programs within the building to be successful. After researching all of these areas, it is obvious that a successful leader should definitely reflect and act upon those decisions to best serve the school. Although some areas may seem redundant, it is important to see the link and connection that points out what areas should be of utter importance for a school leader. Being a reflective, engaged, and active administrator is one goal that I will set for myself during my years of service as a school leader. This plan will help me do just that.

“Education...is a painful, continual and difficult work to be done in kindness, by watching, by warning,...by praise, but above all – by example.”

-John Ruskin

A leader must have the incentive to lead a school through a reflective process. An administrator's job is not an easy one; in fact the daily challenges could wear a person down if he or she doesn't have a strong system of values and critical elements in education to guide the actions a leader must take. I believe that there are several critical elements for effective leadership. These critical elements will become the basis for the majority of decisions that I make throughout my future career as a school leader. A reflective practitioner as the leader of learning is a must and at the core the key elements that I believe should be focused on are parental involvement, societal communicator and facilitator, and, lastly, a

creator and sustainer of school culture that exemplifies learning. I firmly believe that with these critical elements set in place that my leadership will remain a positive influence on students and I will be a consistent, reflective, and effective administrator.

Principal as conductor between parents, students, and staff

As a principal, this job is critical for the success of my future students and staff members. The time that a student spends in the school building is limited, but the time (and how it is spent) outside of the school day can determine what or how successful a student will become in life. With that said, the relationship that exists between the principal and a student's parents will be the determining factor for whether or not a parent will want to get involved or remain involved in his or her child's education.

According to McTamaneay in her 2005 article, there are several key factors for communicating with parents. "Schools need to start first by embracing the basic assumption that parents want to be involved, that they care about their children and their children's experiences during the day, and that they want to feel welcomed and valued in their children's school" (p.14). With those thoughts as the basis for communication with parents, all efforts should be made to keep them involved in their child's education. Jansorn, author of *School, Family, and Community Partnerships Link the Plan*, feels that almost all students who are successful in school have parents who are involved in their child's

education or who offer support at home. Parents who are not currently involved in their child's school usually would like to be. With parents working full-time or raising younger children at home, maintaining some kind of involvement is still necessary and possible (2004).

As a school leader I will need to implement several personal strategies to keep parents in contact with their child and the school, thus having a positive influence on education. I will need to make sure that I am creating a welcoming climate for parents and families by making certain my school's walls are decorated, encouraging staff to be friendly and approachable, and making it mandatory that teachers make regular contact with parents. I will also need to seek out and reach out to those parents who are not actively involved in the school system or at the school building; maybe I could find something they might be interested in and then they will feel welcome. I will also make myself available and let parents know that I can be contacted and reached when they want to talk to me. I should also remain aware of the various cultures and barriers that might exist between students, parents, and the school staff. I believe that researched information about my school's cultural background will help give me an idea of my school's socioeconomic background, and that will lead to a better understand of their personal and social needs. I will also need to provide resources to help parents become involved in their children's education. I should also make sure I am able to give families advice about the varying needs they may have socially. With all of these

implementations in tack, I feel that I will be able to work to the best of my ability to communicate with parents and keep them involved in their children's education.

Principal as the link to society; a unifier between the community and school

A school cannot exist on its own. The need for a connection to the community and their support remains extremely important for operating a school. The community has the ability to open up a plethora of opportunities for schools and students. Unless a school leader understands how to attain community relationships, many opportunities could be lost. Several articles refer to "partnership schools." This idea referred to the concept of openly addressing parents and students about the importance and involvement that will take place between the school and the community. By doing this community groups and leaders can locate resources that will enrich the curriculum.

I will be able to implement several ideas for community involvement when I become a principal. I should coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, colleges or universities, and other community groups. This will help enable students, staff, and families to contribute their service to the community. I should also budget funds that will allow for a couple of activities between my

school and the community. This will give businesses the opportunity to get involved with my school and use the advertising to their advantage.

Principal as creator and maintainer of the school culture

In my opinion, this is one of the hardest critical elements for a school leader to create and maintain. The culture of a school is an unspoken word that is created through *consistent* actions on a daily basis. This element is the final piece to the other critical elements and it remains so important that it is the glue that will keep parents, the community, and professional development stuck in their faith in the school system. After reading several articles, an article by Laurel Schmidt, *Nurturing Teachers in a Famine* (2005), describes what she believes are key ingredients that keep teachers motivated, which, in reality could be applied to my leadership skills. Schmidt describes the four “R’s” for success; recognition, relationships, rewards, and rituals. When teachers are recognized for their hard work they feel appreciated.

In the future I will be able to create and maintain a positive school culture by using Schmidt’s “the four R’s” (2005). Recognition: as a principal I will make a habit of telling my teachers “good job!” This will not be done as a large group, but I feel the compliment paid to teachers needs to be specific and personal. Making comments personal supplies teachers with the knowledge that their school leader pays close personal attention to what they are doing. Not only is it imperative to watch, compliment, and communicate with staff members, sustaining

relationships with faculty is also important. Allowing myself to have professional relationships and taking a sincere interest in what my staff members have to say will create an open environment that will allow teachers and faculty the ability to voice their opinions without worrying about being criticized. Relationships; this will be an easy step because regular communication will have taken place, therefore a relationship has been built. Rewards; through recognition rewards will be given to staff verbally. I also think it is important to give other rewards, such as giving a teacher an extra period off one day, while I fill in for him or her, or giving staff members' gift certificates or even holiday gifts out of pocket. Rituals; this is what will be created over time through consistency and a created culture. Staff and students will come to know, respect, and expect certain ceremonies, recognitions, and behavior over time, through rituals. This will also make school memorable and rewarding for everyone who belongs to my school. With all of my critical elements in place, I believe my journey as a leader will be a success one. I believe that a desire to lead and a drive to follow the critical elements that I hold vital are necessary for the large task that a school administrator is given.

“One must have strategies to execute dreams.”

-Azim Premji

Action means taking chances and moving forward. A school leader has a plethora of responsibilities and at the core is the responsibility of moving forward in educational change. As an administrative leader, a

personal professional vision for practice is essential for leading a successful school. The most important action that a principal can take is to be at the forefront of educational change. With these ideas in mind, I will be able to take the action that is necessary to lead in educational change.

Principal as the leader of educational change

Educational change is what makes things happen. Change encompasses the current trends that research supports to help all students achieve. How can any school incorporate new practices and educator change without the support of a school leader? Educational change is so important because teaching and learning can become stagnant if schools aren't willing to try new ideas, incorporate change, and work with students to increase achievement. Today, our society demands that students are given the best education possible, and the only way to do this is to change current practices and execute new ones. So many current trends in education exist today – homework, technology, college prep schools, student centered classrooms, No Child Left Behind, students' self-esteem and emotional intelligence, etc, that an educational leader must be willing to take the challenge of motivating teachers and students through the action of educational change in the classroom. To speak of educational change is to cover a superfluity of levels in education. Educational change encompasses professional development (time and funding), relationships with staff members, and time spent finding research on educational trends

– what works and what does not. A school leader must be at the forefront of this change to make things happen.

Professional Development

Professional development is perhaps the most important element for a leader to focus on in educational change. Professional development is the time allotted for educators to help lead and learn about education trends and how to integrate them. Thus, the education leads to the action in the classroom. The way that teachers are approached about change is crucial for getting all staff onboard, as well as how time is spent on professional development. These two elements are the key for a positive engagement from staff. Dennis Sparks, author of the article, *The Looming Danger of a Two-Tiered Professional Development System* (2004) believes that professional development time must be spent wisely; therefore a clear goal and focus for the day must be clarified at the beginning of the in-service. He believes that professional development should focus on work with the community and “the exercise of the professional judgment” (p. 304). Thus, the administrator is not in charge of all ideas, answers, and the direction of the work and ideas for the professional development. Teachers who have used this system for professional development time are more open to new ideas, more focused on long-term goals, and use data and other forms of evidence to make decisions. Staff development is spent working in groups, making decisions, analyzing various types of evidence regarding student learning,

setting goals for improvement, planning lessons, and, finally, reflecting. I think this is an excellent idea for professional development time. As a school leader, it is my job to give the focus and the goals for the in-service, and then allow my staff to partake in the change. As a leader in educational change, the best way to get staff involved in change is to allow them to be part of it; Spark's explanation of using staff development time to grow, learn, and collaborate is an excellent way to pave the way for current trends.

Relationships with staff members

Positive relationships with staff members are crucial for a school leader if any type of educational change is going to take place. If staff members have negative feelings about their administrator, then they are going to find it difficult to want to believe or act upon any change in the school system. "When teachers are happy within a positive environment where new teachers and veterans collaborate and the administrator is supportive, students are successful" (Honaker 2004, p. 118). Staff development and relationships with staff go hand in hand. Teachers will be motivated and want to work in an environment where they feel appreciated and interactive with educational change. The changes mandated due to the No Child Left Behind Act have placed new emphasis on the importance of family and school interaction in students' education (Clark, S. & Clark, D. 2005). A school leader should not only create relationships with teachers, but also with community members and

parents. By creating an environment of respect and rapport, educational change can take place.

Staying abreast of current educational trends

Focusing efforts on current trends in education is imperative for gains in test scores, students' attitudes about school, and keeping educators focused on goals in the classroom. One way that a school leader can stay abreast of education trends is by trend watching. According to the article, *The Future of Technology in Schools*, by Christine Y. Mason (2005), the author describes "trend watching" as keeping an eye on the latest information that promotes deep thought and processes about "what if..." The responsibility can be distributed between several groups, such as parents, community members, and local businesses. This trend watching can come from local businesses or universities who work in conjunction with professional organizations, state boards of education, or planning groups within each individual school. Allowing others to become involved in current trends will help school leaders build relationships with educators and the community. This can only result in positive changes for the future. As an educational leader trudging through trend changes, Mason recommends on examining the following basic questions:

1. How can schools plan for this future, form the necessary community alliances, and be prepared to reject some

notions because they represent unsound educational practices?

2. What could school administrators do today and in the next five years to be leaders in this next wave of schooling?
3. Which members of the community might be useful resources to help schools prepare for the future? (p. 47)

Keeping on top of current trends in education is an excellent way for a school administrator to lead in educational change because this will make the leader not only aware, but knowledgeable about what does and does not work.

Educational change plays an important role in the ISSL standards. The administrator's role as the leader in educational change fits many standards for a school leader. In standard one, the role of the leader of education change would meet effective communication (K 1.5), high standards of learning (D 1.2), continuous school improvement (D 1.3), the vision and mission of the school being effectively communicated to staff, parents, students, and community members (P 1.1), and school community involved in school improvement efforts (P 1.7) – just to focus on a few. A leader's focus and participation in educational change also meets state standard requirements for standard two; student growth and development (K 2.1), curriculum design, implementation, evaluation, and refinement (K 2.4), diversity and its meaning for educational programs (K 2.7), the role of technology in promoting student learning and professional growth (K 2.

10), and school cultures and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional development (K 2.11). Standard two also hits the principal's job when "The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to..." school and learning. Essentially, educational change partakes in all these elements of standard two. Focusing on educational change also targets standard three when describing making management decisions to enhance learning and teaching (D 3.1), accepting responsibility (D 3. 4), and having operational procedures that are designed and managed to maximize opportunities for successful learning (P 3.2). Standard four is centered on communication and the need for collaborative leadership. By communicating with staff and community members the barriers prohibiting communication between school and society will be taken down. The behavior of the administrator is important to be successful in educational reform because a leader must be steadfast in his morals and values in order to strive toward change and be committed in the learning process (standard five). Lastly, standard six states: "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." No effective changes can be made in a school unless an administrator is willing to understand and promote the overall goal. As one can clearly see the journey and commitment toward educational change is so important

that all six standards for an effective school leader encompasses the mission for change within a school.

An administrator's role in educational change is pertinent for action to take place. In order for students to reap the benefits of education, a school leader must be actively involved in presenting change and looking at current trends in education. Running a system where all members are stakeholders in educational change is the best way to create an environment where students will want to grow, learn, and change. This is a huge responsibility for a school leader, but it is a challenge I am willing to embark upon someday to help educate students in new and enlightening ways.

“When you decide to give yourself to a great cause, you must arrive at the point where no sacrifice is too great.” -Coretta Scott King

A school leader must be a role model for educators; therefore an administrator must hold enough importance in education to be willing to stay educated him or herself. An unspoken requirement exists of an administrator; if anyone is going to take a leader seriously, the leader must always remain on top of current trends and styles of education. The only way to remain on top is to continue education and believe in it as an administrator.

**Principal as the leader of improvement for learning of both students
and adults**

As the leader of improvement of learning for students and adults, I cannot think of a more important way to help facilitate growth in learning

than to start with professional development. When teachers are educated about best learning practices and current trends in education, the students are the ones who reap the rewards. Thus, to be the leader of learning for not only students, but adult's as well, time, money, and effort must be set aside for professional development time. Professional development benefits administrators, teachers, students, and parents, and, ultimately the society.

Principal as the leader of professional development

How can a school have successful students without successful teachers? One key characteristics as a principal is that I remain determined and consistent in how professional development time is used. This would make time spent with staff useful, consistent, and current. In the article, *Professional Development and Teacher Learning: Mapping the Terrain*, by Hilda Borko (2004), the author offered some valuable pieces of information about how efficient and effective professional development days are crucial for the improvement of schools. No Child Left Behind demands that professional development days are centered on learning and relating to the state standards. Borko pointed out the importance of careful research and studying a program before deciding to implement one into professional development time. As a principal, these decisions must be made by me. Enough time does not exist to give teachers all the training, collaboration, and information about useful and current trends in education, so what time there is must be spent and used wisely. Borko

also indicated that great importance should be placed upon a principal and, thus, the pertinent wise use of professional development time.

Principal as the leader of change

The article, *The Beliefs-Behavior Connection: Leading Teacher Toward Change* (Hunzicker, 2004), also supports the theory of the importance for a leader to be devoted to and supportive of professional development for teachers in order to help the educational growth of students. The article described change in the school system that focused on a new perspective...changing teacher's beliefs. Her article also gave support that more "experienced" teachers are willing to try new trends and concepts in the classroom, instead of the expected, newer teachers. Hunzicker described three reason educators resist change: lack of motivation, levels of knowledge and comfort, and their moral and ego development. The only way that I will be able to help teachers incorporate change in the classroom is to understand what is being taught to the teachers during professional development time, and to be a firm supporter that the change will take place in the school building and that the change will also help students' growth in education. One aspect that I would be careful of is to make sure the trend isn't just that, a trend. As a leader, it will be my responsibility to make sure that all necessary research has been done to support the change that I might ask educators to make. A major downfall of some school leaders is the inconsistency of implementing new ideas or strategies every year – staff wants something they can work on

year after year. No one believes in a leader who is not firm about the changes make in the classroom and willing to support them long-term. I feel that a school leader should conduct proper research before making staff spend development time working on something that only resolves short-term problems. Kathleen King's article, *Both Sides Now: Examining Transformative Learning and Professional Development of Educators* (2004), will be helpful as a school leader because it offered many insights about "how adults integrate new information, perspectives, or practice into their world view as they engage in learning" (King, 155). This will help support the idea of getting all educators on board to make change within the school system. This article also supports the idea of all members of a school and district being active participants – teachers, administrators, superintendent – for change to take place. What better place and time could this happen than during professional development days? As a school leader it will be my job to be at the forefront of the educational change.

Principal as the leader of improvement of learning for students

Students should be the number one reason why anyone becomes a teacher or administrator. With that in mind, the role of a school leader, and the responsibility of how professional development time is spent should focus on teaching students. The article, *Designing Educative Curriculum Materials to Promote Teacher Learning* (Davis & Krajcik, 2005), focused on the importance of designing a curriculum that

challenged students. Again, professional development time should be used for this purpose. Teachers should not only work on educating themselves about best practices for teaching, but one cannot forget about the importance of also focusing efforts on what is going to be taught in the classroom. The materials that are chosen should be relevant to the content and the school's goals and mission statement. As a leader, I need to promote new ideas, thoughts, theories, and offer support in the classroom that stays focused on the curriculum and school's goals. As a leader, it is also my responsibility to make certain that the materials given to teachers remains worthwhile and educational. The Davis & Krajcik believe, "Educative materials should help to increase teachers' knowledge in specific instances of instructional decision-making, but also help them develop more general knowledge that they can apply flexibility in new situations" (Davis & Krajcik, 3). I also believe that, as an administrator, it will be my responsibility to encourage teachers to take risks and allow them the freedom to implement those new strategies into the classroom. When a relationship has been fostered between principal and staff, the possibility of the teachers sharing new ideas and implementing new strategies will create enthusiastic teachers. The end result will be excited students who are ready and willing to learn.

I firmly believe that professional development can be one of the greatest tools for aiding teachers in effective classroom instruction. As a principal, I must research, devote time, and remain passionate about how I

choose to use the time given for teachers' professional development time. Being present and assisting in all development time is a must. I should also collaborate and closely examine and research other school's current trends and strategies being used. I do not think decisions made should be quick fixes, rather, a thorough plan should be thought out, developed, and then implemented for professional development time. I will also make sure that I set aside funding to further develop ideas, such as sending teachers to workshops or presentations, which will aid in their classroom teaching effectiveness. Leading a school is one of the most challenging jobs, for our future depends on it!

“It is not so much what you believe in that matters, as the way in which you believe it and proceed to translate that belief into action.” –

Lin Yutang

Principal as the Leader of Service

As role models, a leader must be able to serve her school. Giving service to the school is a very diverse and complex matter. A principal must be devoted to serving the school at all costs, for it is through service that a school will grow, develop, and prosper into a school that offers a successful educational experience by all students – academically and interpersonally. A school leader must be an active participant in servicing the school through working with the special education services, supporting teachers, connecting to the public, and assisting in extra-curricular programs.

Servicing the Special Education Programs

With the high demands of NCLB, all students' test scores are calculated to determine a school's achievement. At the heart of our low test scores are those students who qualify for special education services. A school leader can make strides to increase the percentage of students who are considered at the proficient level by giving service toward the special education services. The article, *Extra-special Education at Public Expense* (Asimov, 2006) reported that between 1993 and 1994, "the number of special education students grew by 27 percent" (p.10). Also, the number of special education students in private systems at the cost of public school grew at an alarming 128 percent (Asimov, 2006). Dedicating time and energy to giving services toward the special education department is critical for a successful leader. A new vision of integrated education for all students is believed to help more special education students reach proficient levels (*A Special Section on Special Education*, 2005). A principal needs to be on top of current trends in order to make this shift successful.

A school leader who dedicates his services to the special education needs of teachers and students will maintain a high enrollment in the school system. In Nanette Asimov's article, *Extra-special Education at Public Expense* (2006), she explains what happens when schools cannot cater to the needs of the special education students...they leave. Real situations exist where parents are taking their special education students out of the public system and enrolling them in a private school, with the

bill being sent to the public system. When the public school system doesn't offer the right amenities for the children, those services have to be found somewhere – regardless of whether it is public or private. Laws give rights to students to get the education they need at the cost of the public school system. A school leader needs to simply dedicated time, service, energy, and training for special education teachers so the program can be developed and meet the ever-changing needs of our society. In California alone, there were 3,763 children with disabilities who filed formal complaints over educational services – triple that of a decade ago (Asimov, 2006). The school usually ends up paying a costly settlement, so there is an even more expensive hearing.

Servicing the Teachers

Another important area for a leader to devote her services to is the teachers. Since the teachers are the facilitators of all learning, doesn't it make perfect sense to make sure those people are secure, satisfied, and educated on current teaching trends? With No Child Left Behind in tact, it makes sense for teachers to be a high priority within the school building. The principal cannot make students have successful educational experiences, she can only provide the means and beliefs and services for that to happen. *The Financial Times* (2006) supports this claim by stating that the quality of teachers and their commitment and accountability can be inferred from the quality of outcomes in schools. At the forefront are our teachers. They are the ones in the trenches working to help our

students survive. Without quality teachers, one cannot produce quality students.

The ways that a principal can facilitate these services to better educate teachers is to devote valuable time to in-service days, have peer coaching throughout the building, conduct regular curriculum studies, and have a school that believes in divided leadership – thus, giving more power to teachers. The focus that is put on reading and math only emphasizes the importance in what goes on in the classroom (*Here's How Five Treasure Valley Schools are Working to Meet Goals, Improve Student Test Scores and Maintain Classroom Success*, Webb, 2006).

Administrators have a huge impact on teacher leadership. The article, *An Administrator's Challenge: Encouraging Teachers to be Leaders*, explains how school leaders can make divided leadership successful by respecting the new role of teachers, embracing change, providing support, and encouraging collaboration (Davidhizar & Headly, 2006): A school leader who is willing to help improve teaching quality will quickly see that teachers should be given the time they need to improve teaching practices as well as stay abreast of current teaching trends.

Servicing the Community

One must not forget about the importance of staying connected to the public. A true leader should recognize that the community contributes so much to the success of a school. Building relationships with the community will allow a principal to tap into the resources that can be used

to better students' education. Joyce Epstein and Natalie Rodrigues-Jansorn describe the relational benefits that occur when a principal creates relationships between the school and the community. The article, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships Link the Plan* (2004), explains the connection that takes place among schools and families and students when the community is encouraged to become involved in the school system. Students perform better in school when communication exists in the home. Therefore, serving the community should be one of the most important elements for a successful leader.

A solid relationship that is built between a school leader and the community has so much to offer. The public helps one to realize that "perception is reality." The community can be helpful to schools because they could give donations (building improvement, teacher education, etc.), time for services to schools, and school recognition throughout the community. The Toronto Police Department gives service to its students through a children and youth program which allows youths, aged 14 – 17 to participate in community service. This program allows youths to remain connected and give service to the community as well as work one-on-one with other individuals (*Toronto Police and Province Team Up to Help Youth Succeed*, 2006). These types of programs not only help the school remain connected to the community, but they also have the ability to provide positive attention for students who, might have otherwise, sought out negative attention.

Servicing All Before and After School Programs

The last area of service that a successful school leader should hold of utter importance is extra-curricular activities. As one can attest, those students who remain actively engaged in school have higher grade points and stay out of trouble. Aside from helping students stay involved in activities, a principal must also give service by supervising extra-curricular activities. The article, *Legal Dimensions of School Activities* (S. Permuth & R. Permuth, 2000), reminds leaders of their legal responsibilities to support after-school activities for students. “A principal’s failure to successfully fulfill that role can result in litigation against the principal for negligence (S. Permuth & R. Permuth, p.34). As one can easily see there is more than one reason to support all school activities.

The role of a school leader can be quite challenging, especially to help meet all the needs of students in a diverse and ever-changing world. One way to stay connected and committed to the school is to provide services to outlets that need it most in order to offer excellent educational opportunities for its students. Woodward testifies, “Each spring, parents must sign their children up for the school they want to attend” (*Student Blur District Lines Academics, Climate, Convenience Factors in K-12 Transfers*, 2006, p.1). A school leader must remain devoted to servicing the needs of the school and the students. Servicing a school and supporting a school are so similar that they could be interchanged. A

school leader who services the school will have a building with a high enrollment that prepares and sustains educated and connected students for the real world.

Becoming a school leader is, perhaps, one of the most important jobs that a person can take on. In order to be successful at this position, I have clearly stated what I believe to be the most pertinent elements to focus on. As a future school leader, I am committed to following the plans that I have set forth. Striving for excellence will be the only way to fulfill the goals that I have set forth in my beliefs. Reflecting for action will put all of my beliefs and goals into place. Action will be successful with a commitment to school improvement for students, parents, teachers, and the community.

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