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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

Principals are leaders who must use their personal characteristics, morals, ethics and knowledge to successfully lead their staff and community. When a principal develops and understands his personal qualities and applies them, his school will have the leadership component necessary for success. This paper is my attempt to learn about myself through reflection and education. It is a compilation of my beliefs on leadership, schooling, education, others and myself—all of which will guide me when I become a school administrator.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

and Postsecondary Education

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by

Jeffrey N. Novotny

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Introduction

When observing the public school system from the outside, one might feel that most school administrators all act in a similar manner when addressing students, parents and staff members. Much of the community assumes that principals are required to follow a set of guidelines and rules when issues arise. They concur that principals are not allowed to make decisions for themselves, as if their hands are tied. Staff members, in many cases, agree with the community. I often hear fellow colleagues complain about decisions that school administrators make. Some feel that administrators are like puppets, following the book on every problem that surfaces. Regarding issues of equality, discrimination and the law, I can justify this argument. However, I also believe that each principal needs his or her own vision.

Principals are leaders who must use their personal characteristics, morals, ethics and knowledge to successfully lead their staff and community. When a principal develops and understands his personal qualities and applies them, his school will have the leadership component necessary for success. This paper is my attempt to learn about myself through reflection and education. It is a compilation of my beliefs on leadership, schooling, education, others and myself--all which will guide me when I become a school administrator.

Personal Characteristics

Goal Oriented

Goals are an essential element to be a successful leader. If goals are not set and strived for, school administrators will have a difficult time focusing and working to improve their school. Goals are challenges for the principal to try to accomplish for the betterment of their school, staff and students. In my teaching and coaching career, I have always used goal setting to motivate my students and myself. This characteristic will be necessary when creating a vision for the staff and students of my school. I will need to set high goals in a variety of areas such as student achievement, discipline, and curriculum.

Dedication is a key element of accomplishing the goals that a leader sets. "All good work is worthy of our dedication. And the most worthy is what changes lives profoundly—in mind, body and spirit" (Monroe, 1997, p.34). I believe to be the best principal possible you have to be dedicated. Principals who are dedicated to their staff, students and schools accomplish much more than ones who are not. Many different types of distractions and problems will arise during a school year. Principals who have set challenging, yet attainable goals and who are dedicated and diligent to their administrative practices will not let these distractions alter their drive to achieve their goals.

I am also a very determined individual. I feel that determination is a key characteristic for principals. School administrators will have staff members,

parents and members of the community that analyze every decision they make. Principals cannot let others influence their decisions if they feel their decision is the best for their students and school. Many people will be looking to benefit their own personal interests and not what is best for the school population. Principals must make sure to always consider the best solution for the entire school. This determination will spread to others in the school community and lead to greater student achievement. Being both a dedicated and determined leader, I will be able to accomplish the goals I have set for the students, staff and myself.

Hard Working

I believe there is not a person who works harder for their goals than myself. I have been fortunate to have parents, coaches and teachers that have instilled a hard working attitude in my life. Nothing comes easily, and to successfully lead a school, it will take an enormous amount of hard work. Principals need to have a hard-working attitude when it comes to leading their school. Hard work is the most important characteristic for a high school principal. I know I will not always make the correct decisions. Administrators who work hard to make the right decisions will have fewer mistakes and learn lessons from them. Hard working individuals are also very organized. Leaders realize that being organized is critical when they have multiple responsibilities.

To maximize the amount of work that a principal can accomplish, organization is essential.

Education is a profession that is always changing. Teaching strategies, learning styles, technology, the Internet, school reform and new laws are continually updated and improved. It takes diligent and hard-working leaders to understand the ever-changing American school system. I feel that hard working individuals are contagious. If the staff and students of a school see a principal who works as hard to make them all successful, the staff and students will be more likely to raise their own work habits. I will be a principal who provides this type of leadership.

Effective Communicator

School administrators must be able to communicate effectively with others. I am good at communicating in a variety of ways; however, communication is a skill that I must continue to improve. One of my overall strengths is verbal communication. As a head coach, I have had many opportunities to talk to students and their parents. Parent meetings at the beginning of each season and award banquets at the conclusion have given me experience in communicating to a large group of people. Principals need to talk clearly and informatively. It is important that the public understands what I am trying to say and the message is clear.

I enjoy dealing with parents who want the best for their children. Parents put an enormous amount of trust in the school system and the staff. It is the principal's job to insure parents that their children are safe while they are on the school campus. I have always had good relationships with others because I am clear with my message and I am informative. It is also important for principals to be clear when speaking to their staff and students.

Written communication is equally important. This is something I have to work on continuously. I am not the best writer, however, it is a skill I am good at because I am willing to work hard at mastering it. Principals need to be professional writers. Many letters and memos will reach the hands of the public, staff and students. Just like with verbal communication, written documents need to be clear and concise. After finishing a document, readers need to have a good understanding of it.

Effective Motivator

Motivation is essential in accomplishing the goals of a school. I always feel good when one of my athletes thanks me for motivating them. They say they would do whatever I asked of them. I would bring this type of motivation to my staff. I believe most motivation is intrinsic. Every individual is different and is motivated in different ways. It is up to the principal to find ways to motivate each member of his staff. Through my coaching and athletic background, I can be the type of principal that will get their staff to work for me.

I am also a "natural leader". I have been in that role ever since I can remember. Although it usually has come in the athletics realm, I have always been a leader both verbally and by example. Others have always looked at me as someone they wanted to lead them. I was elected captain of my college and high school cross country and track teams. I feel this is because I lead by example. This is the best way to lead a group of people, especially professionals. Showing people that you are going to help them accomplish their goals is very powerful.

Kenneth Hinton, principal of the Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Education Center states,

I guess what I am saying is that we give importance to the quality of the relationships that exist not only between teachers, but between teachers and custodians, cafeteria people and custodians, and vice versa, because they are so impacting on what eventually happens to the children, because we model for the children, and if we as adults cannot model that we want them to do it serves no purpose. Basically what I would like to see take place is we need to live what we teach. We need to live what we want our children to do. (Lyman, 2000, p. 87)

Anyone can tell their staff that they want them to do something, but great leaders show them by example. Leaders are respected more if they lead by example.

I am also very supportive of others. I have always been someone who others could come to for help, advice, and guidance. I enjoy helping others in this manner. These characteristics will help me gain the respect from my staff and students. I want to be able to help new and tenured teachers with their struggles. I want them to know that I was once a teacher with the same struggles they are

encountering. If trust is developed between an administrator and his staff, the students will be the ones who benefit academically.

Morally Sound

I am a leader who is morally sound. Along with the characteristics I have already stated, this is one necessary for an effective principal. I am a person who is trusting, and will pass that trust along to my staff and fellow administrators by supporting and defending their decisions. I am, however, aware that trust is something which people might take advantage. I will work with those people to become better teachers. I am also a caring individual. I cherish my relationships with others and work to strengthen them. Staff members need to know that their boss is caring. This quality will help strengthen my relationships with others. I feel that I am a role model to students as a teacher. I will be a role model to the community, staff and students as principal.

I realize people have different attitudes, morals, values and priorities. Although I might not agree with everyone who I come in contact with, I will respect his or her views and beliefs. I also realize that parents and the community are a huge part of a successful school. They need to see a principal who is willing to listen and work with them. I am someone who believes in life-long learning. When a person feels that they have mastered a goal, this is when they usually fail. Principals need to always continue to improve and educate themselves. I will be

an administrator who continuously works with the community and staff to make myself a better principal.

Problem Solver

One of the most important concepts that I teach in my math classes is problem solving. This is the one concept they can take with them and use in many different situations. With my mathematics background, I am a good problem solver. I believe in following a series of steps to identify the problem and find ways to solve it. As Aronson (2000) stated, "We are tempted to look for instant solutions before we fully understand the cause of the problem" (p. 7). One concept I teach my students is the idea that there are usually many ways to solve the same problem, however there is one method, which will be more effective than the others. According to Wilson and Corbett (2001), students feel the same way. "Teachers not only had to be willing to help but also had to be good at explaining. A teacher could be adept at providing explanations in several ways" (p. 33). I believe this is true in school leadership. I will work to find the best solutions for the problems I encounter. I will attack problems as they arise. Procrastination creates anger and frustration among people. I realize that with problems there is often someone who feels that he has lost and will not agree with my decision. As the leader of the school, I will express to everyone that I am making my decisions in the best interest of the school community. All of these characteristics are important in being a school leader. Like Thomas, Fitzhugh-

Walker, and Jefferies (2000) state, "Unless the principal exhibits strong leadership qualities, the restructuring process can never really begin" (p. 50). These qualities are all strengths of mine, but also areas I need to continue to work on throughout my career as a principal.

Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes from Experience and Coursework

Visionary Leadership

The vision of a school is the one concrete object that can hold a school staff together to facilitate student achievement. A vision needs to be developed in order for all members of the school community to have guidance for their teaching. A clear vision eliminates doubts in the minds of the staff on what the school is trying to accomplish. All teachers can use the vision to guide their lessons. "A vision that is not clearly articulated is one that is likely to be lost," (Speck, 1999, p. 56). The primary concern for a school's vision should be student achievement and a quality curriculum. The vision of a quality curriculum should be meaningful, technological, and outcome based. Glatthorn (2000) believes that "Two goal-related tasks are important in developing the school's curriculum: identifying the educational goals and aligning goals with programs and subjects" (Glatthorn, 2000, p. 49). This is the basis for a shared vision.

It is important that the school develops a shared vision, however, this task is easier said than done. A shared vision is one that is developed by the entire school staff. "Senge et al. (1994) defined a shared vision as the core of a learning

organization: Shared Vision – building a sense of commitment in a group, by developing shared images of the future we seek to create, and the principles and guiding practices by which we hope to get there” (Speck, 1999, p. 53). School administrators along with teachers need to work together to develop a vision that will guide the school in accomplishing its goals. Every member of the school staff needs to be a stakeholder in the developing process of the vision.

As a principal, it is critical that each staff member is involved in developing the vision. “The principal as educator must not only have a vision, but also facilitate, translate, and build it into a school community vision for educating students” (Speck, 1999, p. 37). It is the principal’s task to take his personal vision and engrave this vision into the minds of his or her staff. The staff needs to believe and create a vision that is in line with the personal vision of the principal. I was involved in a practicum experience that involved developing a vision at my high school. I facilitated a study team made up of teachers who discussed our current vision statement and how it could be revised. *Every teacher gave input on the statement and how it could be made more effective with the goals that they were trying to accomplish in their own classroom. This was a great way for the staff to take ownership in the school vision. The teachers now have a connection to the vision and will not consider it just a piece of paper that they hang on the wall.*

Instructional Leadership

The single most important goal of school administrators today is to maximize student achievement. In order for this to happen the school community must be educated on cognitive approaches of instruction. It is the principal's responsibility to make sure that the teachers are educated on a variety of teaching and learning methods and strategies. In today's schools, the principal is not the sole provider of instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is a collaborative effort between the building administrators and teachers. Odden (1995) states that the new role of the principal in instructional leadership is facilitative:

Rather than being the key decision-maker and 'thinker' in the school as the person holding the top position in the hierarchy, principals in restructuring schools facilitated the activities of myriad groups and subgroups all engaged in decision-making on several fronts. (Speck, 1999, p. 131)

Principals must be the facilitator of instructional leadership, with the teachers acting as the knowledge bearer. Principals are not the primary provider of knowledge; they are the catalyst behind the scenes. Danielson (1996) describes this framework for teaching:

A framework for professional practice can be used for a wide range of purposes, from meeting novices' needs to enhancing veterans' skills. Because teaching is complex, it is helpful to have a road map through the territory, structured around a shared understanding of teaching. Novice teachers, of necessity, are concerned with day-to-day survival; experienced teachers want to improve their effectiveness and help their colleagues do so as well;

highly accomplished teachers want to move toward advanced certification and serve as a resource to less-experienced colleagues. (Danielson, 1996, p. 2)

As a secondary building principal, I would educate the lead teachers in each department on different cognitive learning models that will enhance student achievement. The lead teachers are responsible to educate their departments on different approaches of positive instruction. Every department will schedule monthly meetings where different faculty members can lead in the instruction of different learning models. Principals need to provide needed resources and support when needed. Teachers need to feel that they have the power to experiment and learn together with the vision of the school in mind.

Through staff development, the principal and staff can work together to discuss which strategies have been successful. Teachers can share ideas between departments to further help instruction. Educators who are feeling success can model sample lessons for the staff to train them on different cognitive instructional methods. The principal needs to make sure that these lessons are in line with cognitive approaches and follow the shared vision of the school. A teacher observing another on different models being demonstrated is another way of educating the staff on learning strategies. While observing, the teacher can tell how effective the lesson is and if it is effecting student achievement. Self-assessment is also a very good way to improve instruction. "Teachers are highly perceptive of their own skills in teaching, and are, or can become, extremely

accurate in their perceptions. Further, the act of self-assessment requires reflection, an activity documented through research to yield professional learning and growth” (Danielson and McGreal, 2000; p. 47). Constructive, positive and negative feedback can be given to the teacher to help them improve further lessons.

As an instructional leader, a principal must demand high standards from the students. In many cases, the standards that measure student achievement is lowered to accommodate students who have not been successful in the classroom. Also, many schools with poor students are likely to expect less when it comes to learning and performance. In Houston, McAdams (2000) states, “We expect principals and teachers in these schools to develop teaching methods that meet the learning needs of poor children, and we hold them accountable for the performance of their students” (p. 258). Principals can no longer find excuses for poor student achievement. Principals must believe that all students can learn and strive to accomplish that goal. “Ultimately, we conclude that for (instructional) reform to be successful it has to touch students’ classroom lives noticeably—and students are in the best position to let us know that this has occurred” (Wilson and Corbett, 2001, p. 4). A principal needs to observe and interact with students in the classroom setting to see if the instruction is making a difference in their learning achievement.

Another area where principals need to be an instructional leader is in the realm of technology. "As a leader and facilitator for the learning community, the principal must understand the importance of keeping abreast of technological change" (Speck, 1999, p. 189). Tomorrow's schools are going to be technology based with teachers guiding instruction through the Internet and various educational computer programs. School staffs are going to be experts on how to use technology to guide their lessons with a cognitive approach. This will be a major challenge for administrators because of many teachers resistance to technology. Technology committees need to be formed by the principal to include administrators, teachers, parents, and students in the decision-making process. These committees are going to have to demonstrate how technology benefits student achievement. Principals will have to dedicate much time and effort to keeping up with the ever-changing technological world. Teachers need to continually be informed of new and exciting ways to educate their student's with technology.

Technology will change schools instruction from the original textbook and paper lessons to student-centered, interactive approaches. Students can have a variety of instructional methods and combine them to form their own hypothesis. Traditional methods of student assessment will also change to performance based, portfolio, or student projects very simply with the use of technology. Student interest and involvement will increase, as lessons become more "real-life".

Technology is one example of the importance of a principal's responsibility in instructional leadership. "A key to successful schools is the development of school wide instructional leadership working to the benefit of all students" (Cunningham and Cordeiro, 2000, p. 140). I feel that the plan I have will lead to better student achievement for all.

Organizational Leadership

Principals' most important job is to create a learning environment that benefits all students. However, is this possible if the organization of the school is not functioning well? Cunningham and Cordeiro (2000) state that "principals must first and primarily be the instructional leader, but not at the expense of effectively managing the school" (p. 140). Many school leaders do not run an organized school; therefore, the instruction and achievement suffer. The most effective school administrators run an organized school, which limits the problems and confusion among the students, staff and parents, and lets the principal spend the majority of his time working on student achievement.

One area that is important is the responsibilities of the staff. The principal needs to be very clear for which functions each of the staff members is responsible. Having assistant principals who understand their job requirements and responsibilities is essential. These important people needed to be able to solve problems that may arise in their areas without consulting with the principal on every decision. Tasks for assistant principals include discipline,

activities/athletics, scheduling, and assigning duties. These fellow professionals have to be able to handle these duties to let the principal be more effective.

Secondary schools need to have good lead teachers in each department. These department chairs can solve many problems with teachers in their area before it is brought to the principal's attention. The department chair acts as a "middle-man" between the principal and the teachers when problems surface. Staff development, training and budgeting can all be done with communication through the department lead teacher.

Having a good head custodian and staff is also necessary. The majority of many administrators' days are spent trying to solve problems with the physical running of the school. The head custodian needs to understand the operations of the school and be able to solve problems on his or her own. They need to have good leadership qualities so they can successfully lead their custodial staff on problems within the building. Finally, a secretarial staff that can handle immediate problems will save an administrator valuable time. Although many problems can be solved before they involve the principal through this type of leadership, a principal always needs to be ready for the unexpected. Cunningham and Cordeiro (2000) state, "Principals must also be prepared to handle critical incidents that typically occur with little or no advanced warning. How effectively the principal deals with critical incidents ultimately determines his or her effectiveness and that of the school" (p. 139).

An issue that is prevalent in today's schools is student behavior and violence. Having a violence plan or behavior intervention system in effect is mandatory for an organizational leader. Total staff involvement and commitment is necessary for a behavior plan to be successful. Just like the vision statement, all staff members should have input when deciding on this plan. If the staff feels their voices were heard, they will be more likely to follow the plan. Many behavior plans in the past involved suspensions or expulsions from school. These have proven to be unsuccessful in many instances because they did not educate the students. "Plans should treat students with respect, place responsibility on students, encourage appropriate choices, and teach social skills" (Cunningham and Cordeiro, 2000, p. 270). Behavior plans need to not only punish students, but educate them on consequences and results of their actions. Bullying and taunting are behaviors that need education to correct. Aronson (2000) states that schools need to teach students to get along.

There are many ways of doing this, from teaching children to recognize and understand their emotions, to helping students develop greater empathy for others, to giving students the tools to resolve conflicts, to actively teaching students ways to make friends. I have often thought that learning some of the principles of social psychology would be useful to high school students in their daily lives. (Aronson, 2000, p. 106)

School violence is also an important topic. Every school should have a plan in case a severe violence incident occurs. The principal must inform the staff on their responsibilities to ensure the safety of the students in the building. Many

schools are enforcing rules such as no backpacks or coats allowed in school, metal detectors in the entrance areas, school police officers and locked doors throughout the day. Aronson (2000) states, "An action that might have a positive impact in some neighborhoods might have a negative effect in others" (p. 55). Certainly, metal detectors and such severe strategies against violence are not needed in every school across the nation. The principal is responsible to ensure the safety and well being of the student in their facility. Whatever precautions they feel necessary must be taken to ensure this.

Another instance of a principal showing organizational leadership is developing the budget. With the movement toward site-based management, principals are faced with the issue of deciding where and to whom the money goes in their building. Speck (1999) stated, "The learning community, led by the principal, must regard budget development as a means of fulfilling the school's vision (p. 171). Principals have difficult decisions to make when deciding which programs get certain funding. Schools should move more to a site budget team that together makes decisions on the tough issues. According to Speck (1999), the site budget team should share the decision-making process and consist of teachers, principals, staff members, students, parents and other community members (p. 175). The team after much research decides on the school budget keeping the school's vision as the underlying goal. The principal must educate the team on past budgets and how the resources were divided to meet the needs of

the school. Team members then research further trying to find better ways to improve the educational program. The team needs to keep the school's vision in mind, along with the demographics and diversity of the school community. Once a final budget is reached, the principal evaluates if the budget is meeting the needs of the school and its vision. Again, the process gives ownership to many individuals in the school community, which in turn has everyone working together to improve student achievement.

Collaborative Leadership

One of the underlying principles of the ideas presented in this reflective paper is the involvement of teachers, parents, students, and community members along with principals in the decisions that face a school everyday. This idea of working together is reinforced by McAdams (2000):

Urban school reformers everywhere must deal with public opinion, the media, the state education agencies, business interests, teacher unions, organized labor, political parties, taxpayer groups, neighborhood interests, discrimination and ethnic conflict, and the core educational issues of curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment, accountability, and management effectiveness. (p. 248)

This idea of shared leadership is the definition of collaboration. "The real leader is a servant of the people she leads" (Monroe, 1997). Most of today's schools have isolated leadership and are not following these practices. Urban schools of this nature will have a very difficult time of reforming toward better student achievement. "Restructuring cannot evolve if a top-down leadership style

remains. That style conveys that inequality is acceptable—that there are superiors and subordinates. The transformational style conveys that school issues can be resolved collaboratively” (Thomas, Fitzhugh-Walker, and Jefferies, 2000, p. 57).

Developing a community of collegiality is very long and difficult process. The principal must make sure that all stakeholders feel their ideas and thoughts are used in determining the best way to educate children. Collaboration “is characterized by mutual respect, shared work values, cooperation and specific conversations about teaching and learning” (Speck, 1999, p. 113). By involving these stakeholders in many decisions, this will help develop the trust needed to improve the school.

The principal must serve as the leader of the collaborative team effort. They must at times be a motivator, listener, creative questioner and excellent communicator with fellow team members. The principal must keep the group on task to attain the objectives of the vision. “To get on with the work, there are times you have to compromise. But learn the difference between compromising and selling your soul” (Monroe, 1997, p. 88). Parent participation can benefit the child not only in school, but also in their own home. Parents will be more likely to work with the school to educate their children at home. Also, involving the community will only help area businesses and companies. McAdams (2000) states, “...Unlike private schools, public schools cannot focus on just satisfying parent and students. They must also satisfy the public” (p. 250). These

community members can also benefit the students. "Community involvement provides the school learning community with rich resources of expertise, experience, application and opportunities for community service" (Speck, 1999, p. 113). These are excellent ways for students to learn real world problem solving applications.

One practicum experience I have been involved with has been with our schools building improvement team. This team is made up of administrators and teachers with much involvement and advice from parents, community members and students. The team has worked on the vision of the school and work to improve the reading scores of the students. By involving various members of the school community, the school's learning environment has improved.

Ethical Leadership

Often principals have to make decisions on tough issues that effect the school's learning environment. Sometimes these decisions are simple to make because there is a clear right or wrong answer to the problem. Unfortunately, many decisions that principals and school teams have to construct do not have clear choices. Ethical decisions often involve a variety of acceptable answers. Many different members of the school community might support the range of answers, which creates a very complicated problem for the principal. If the principal makes a choice, it might upset the stakeholders that supported the other

options that the principal had. This can cause tension between staff members and the administration. The end result will negatively affect students learning.

There are characteristics that a principal can possess to help with ethical decisions. One of these key characteristics is developing trust with others in the school. This is not an easy task for a principal. Trust is developed over time when a principal has had a variety of chances to work with their staff and community. It is very critical that a new principal develops trust as soon as possible by creating good working relations with each member of his staff. The principal should be a person who a teacher can turn to in time of need. Lyman (2000) states "These informal caring leadership practices contribute to good relationships between faculty and the administrators" (p. 125). Administrators need to take time out of their demanding lives to build up these relationships. "Without trust, the learning community cannot function. Trust is a key element of a learning communities soul. Without this important level of trust, individuals will not fully participate or commit to the work of the learning community" (Speck, 1999, p.59). Trust and caring are also important in improving student achievement. "A central feature in most urban education reform initiatives these days is increasing students' sense of belonging at school and, thereby, their commitment to coming to and working at school" (Wilson and Corbett, 2001, p. 1). Thomas, Fitzhugh-Walker, and Jefferies (2000) agree stating, "Educators must care for more than the completion of assignments, classroom behavior and

test scores. All educators must begin to internally care for the well being and happiness of students” (p. 74).

Honesty is also a priceless quality that a building administrator must possess. The quickest thing that can ruin a successful school and learning environment is a principal that is not honest with their staff and community. Honesty guides the principal’s actions in operating the school. If a principal can demonstrate honesty, fairness, caring and trust with the staff, parents and community, the development of the school community and the goals of the shared vision will be a process that continues to expand and grow stronger. “A school leader grounded in caring rebuilds community by drawing a larger circle, by including families in the circle of caring” (Lyman, 2000, p. 149).

Political Leadership

A principal’s role in political leadership has a variety of different aspects. One of the most important areas of school politics is the law. The law is ever changing and principals must research recent law cases that deal with students and their rights. Students have countless civil rights in the public schools. Principals must inform their staffs on the law and make sure that it is followed. Principals must also inform parents of their rights pertaining to their children. Making available information dealing with the law and due process is an important step when trying to avoid lawsuits. Many cases that deal with students can be prevented with proper notification.

Another aspect of the law deals with special education policies. In the public schools today, most laws that are broken are with special education students. The principal needs to make sure that teachers are educated on the national and state statutes dealing with students with special needs. Accommodations, modifications, suspensions, inclusion, the least restrictive environment, individual education plans and related services are all areas that the school staff needs to have expertise on. Special education teachers should help and support the general education teachers when dealing with special education law. In the same manner, general education teachers must know how important it is to follow the law with special needs students. The principal needs to lead these groups of teachers to work as one so that all children are guaranteed a free appropriate public education. The one thing that every case lost by school districts that I have read was poor documentation on events and procedures followed by school staffs. Principals must demand that their staff document everything that occurs with the students in their buildings.

Another facet of political leadership for principals is understanding where the finances come from for public schools. Often, there are not enough resources to satisfy the entire budget and cuts must be made. Most of school funding comes from state governments in the form of taxes. Although in many instances the federal government demands many programs and services, they supply less than ten percent of a school's finances. School administration must know different

ways to generate extra funding to support the educational programs of their school. One method is fund raising in the community. Having different school organizations and foundations that go into the community and raise money for their programs is a great method of generating finances. Another method is trying to pass law in the local community to support raising sales taxes or passing bond issues. This takes much work and community involvement. The principal must be a salesman of their school and convince the public that the extra funding is needed. The principal must connect the public to the school and give examples of ways the funds will benefit the entire community. Finally, the principal must work on preparing and writing grants for extra funding. Being able to successfully write grants will be key for principals to gain finances for student achievement.

My Personal Professional Vision

As a principal, I will be a visionary leader. It is important that I have set goals for my staff and myself. This vision is the one concrete object that the staff can look to guide their instruction. This vision needs to be shared by all and continue to be updated. The stakeholders of my school need to express their ideas and thoughts about my vision in order to make it better. I will install the vision in every school function. We will be a staff working together as one team to reach our ultimate goal of student achievement.

As a principal, I will be an instructional leader. Although I have taken a new profession as a principal, I am still an educator. I have to give my staff the

tools and models of instruction they need in order to be successful in the classroom. I need to keep current on new and innovative forms of instruction and assessment. Through staff development, study groups and department meetings, my staff will work to become the best cognitive instructors possible.

As a principal, I will be an organizational leader. For schools to work toward their vision and student learning, it must be a well-organized community. I will be very specific on the jobs and responsibilities of my staff. I will lead by example and show my staff that I will work hard to perform the objectives of my job. I will expect nothing less from them. I believe in the idea if everyone does his or her part, the team will be incredibly successful in obtaining the shared vision. I will have to instill this belief in my staff. Our ultimate goal is student achievement. If the teachers, custodians, counselors, aids, and administrators perform their job tasks to the best of their ability, we will attain our goal.

As a principal, I will be a collaborative leader. I will work hard with the staff, parents, students and community to incorporate their beliefs on education into our school. I will include these stakeholders in many of the important decisions that take place in a public school. Hiring new teachers, building improvement teams, budgeting and developing curriculum are just some areas that need to be developed with a collaborative effort. I realize that I am still a learner. I feel that when a professional thinks they have learned everything they need to know, that is usually the beginning point of failure. I will listen and learn

from the people that are involved in my school. I will communicate with them and give constructive feedback on ideas that they believe in. This process will strengthen our school and further develop our school's vision.

As a principal, I will be an ethical leader. To gain the respect of my staff, I will need to be very honest and lead with good morals. There are very difficult decisions when you are the leader of a high school. I will use my education and best judgment when making decisions that effect students and the school. I will work hard to gain the trust of my staff. The best way to start this process is to show them that I will work hard to make them successful. I share the same vision as the teachers in my school and will help them work to meet the goals of that vision.

As a principal, I will be a political leader. Through education, I have learned much about the law and how it affects schools. I am responsible to keep up with new laws and policies and educate my staff on these changes. If there are teachers that are not following the law, it is my duty to inform them and help them change their ways. I also need to work to find available funding from the community or government. There will be times that writing grants or campaigning for bond issues will arise. I will be a leader in these realms to ensure that my school has the necessary resources to successfully fund all of the programs and departments that will ensure student achievement in a well-rounded manner.

Conclusion

In today's schools, student achievement is a very complex issue. There are many questions that can be asked to determine if a child is going to be successful. Are the teachers in the school community educating the students with a cognitive approach? Are the students in the building safe? Are the appropriate programs and services receiving the proper funding? Do the parents and community support the school and the education it's providing? Do the teachers work collaboratively to ensure the best learning environment? The number of questions is countless. Principals have an overwhelming task to make sure that all of these questions are answered to ensure every student's success.

Good leadership skills are essential when running a flourishing learning environment. The national ISLLC standards give principals a great guide on what type of leaders they should strive to be. The indicators give specific thoughts to guide their leadership style. As a future principal, I will use these standards and indicators to direct me in the leadership of my school. In my introduction I stated that many citizens do not understand at times the decision making of building administrators. When principals follow the six ISLLC standards on leadership, this bridge between principals and the staff, parents, students and community will be easily crossed.

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