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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

I believe the six Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards are like puzzle pieces; without all the pieces, the puzzle is incomplete. My vision as an administrator is to have a balance of the six standards. Each standard plays an important role and should be present for all administrators to be effective. I foresee myself constantly reviewing these standards as an administrator. I will make every effort to implement the six standards so all children can and will learn.

I will promote student learning and staff professional growth in a safe and efficient environment. I believe in involving families and community members to support student learning. Acting with fairness and in an ethical manner is very important to me. Everyone should be treated equally, both students and staff. I see myself as a visionary, always looking for methods to improve as an administrator and doing what is best for the students and staff.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

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By

Diane Pick-Harrington

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I believe the six Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (ISLLCS) are designed to fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. The six standards need to be integrated so that aspiring and practicing principals understand what the effective educational leader needs to look like, be like and act like. All six standards need to be in place and practiced to be an effective leader.

My passion is to combine these six standards with my teaching experience to create an environment where all children have the opportunity to learn and grow. The school's vision and mission should be developed and communicated with and among staff, parents, students, and community members. The school culture and instructional programs should be conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. I believe families and community members should be actively involved in the school's goals. All stakeholders should be aware of student learning and instructional programs taking place in the building. The school and community serve as partnerships to help strengthen programs and support school goals. I will act with integrity and fairness to ensure every student has a safe, efficient and effective learning environment. Effective accommodations for all students will be encouraged to take place throughout the building. Staff members need the opportunity to develop and share collaborative skills to promote the success of students. I strongly believe in treating students and staff equally. It should be expected that all stakeholders in the school community demonstrate integrity and exercise ethical behavior toward others.

The school vision, mission, and the implementation plans must be regularly monitored, evaluated and revised with all stakeholders when appropriate. The school community works within the framework of policies, laws and regulations enacted by local, state and federal authorities.

3.3.3 Visionary Leadership

A visionary leader promotes the success of all students facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community. I believe visionary leadership is an explicit agreement by all stakeholders who agree on the values, beliefs and goals that guide behaviors. It challenges and stretches everyone in the school and community to work together. I believe a vision reflects the needs of a community that not only improves education; it also builds the relationship between the school and its public. According to Stephen R. Covey, “vision is the fundamental force that drives everything else in our lives. It empowers us to put first things first, compasses ahead of clocks, people ahead of schedules and things” (Covey, Merrill & Merrill, 1994, p.116).

The vision and mission must be communicated to staff, parents, students and the community. The principal must create a climate for readiness and a culture for change. David Conley notes that principals who have already adjusted to new ways of thinking often underestimate the time needed for others to do the same. He says that all participants must have the opportunity to examine their

current thinking, develop a rationale for change, and entertain new models (Conley, D.T., Dunlap, D.M., & Goldman, P., 1992, p.1). The leader is most likely the chief instigator and promoter to create a vision with needed support by stakeholders.

Administrators must be willing to release their personal ownership when the time comes for implementation of the vision. The involvement of teachers is necessary, since they are the ones who must translate abstract ideas into practical classroom applications. They can do this best when they are actively involved in assisting to develop the vision. Their involvement could improve the quality, acceptance, or implementation of the decision and when the involvement is based on people's desired level of involvement.

I believe the vision and mission involves ongoing communication. The administrator has many communication roles to demonstrate. Administrators find themselves in the role of recipient of messages from others. If the communication to, from, and within an organization is to be efficient and effective, then a school leader will need to become a monitor and seeker of communication. The needs and concerns must be addressed and a vision will develop. The vision should be in written form for all stakeholders to view. The vision can be modified as the school learns from experience.

It is also important for curriculum, staffing, evaluation and budget to feel success of the created vision or it will gradually lose credibility. Many leaders

believe a vision is a straightforward task of stating a belief and then implementing it. A vision is more of an evolutionary process than a one-time event. It is a process that requires continuous reflection, action and reevaluation. Larry Lashway noted Lorain Hong's definition of vision as "purposeful tinkering." "Through dozens of little experiments, each day is an opportunity to come closer to your perceived idea" (Lashway, 1997, p.2). Principals reinforce the vision by speaking enthusiastically about the vision by encouraging experiments, forgiving failures and celebrating successes.

Instructional Leadership

An instructional leader promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional development. To me, the purpose of Instructional Leadership is to keep people motivated and compelled to work toward their instructional vision. Several authors agree that effective schools movement has most often described the successful principal as the key to the school, the instructional leader, the person who knows what effective instruction looks like, how to evaluate it, and how to help teachers improve their instruction (Thomas, Walker & Jefferies, 2000, p.19). I believe school administrators and teachers need to have the knowledge to provide instruction to students to prepare them for the future.

All individuals are to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect. Culture

change is reality and is on-going. I believe we need to instruct and model to students that people have different values, beliefs, morals and skill levels. According to Kent Peterson, “what a principal talks about, pays attention to, and reinforces while walking around the building or conducting school activities will greatly influence teachers’ behavior, and thus the organization’s culture” (Peterson, K.D. & Deal, T.E., 1998, p.30). I will support rituals or ceremonies in the school environment. It helps stress the importance of values and it provides an opportunity to reward behaviors exemplifying these values and ideals.

Schools are organized and aligned for success when there is an understanding of teachers and students different learning styles. Although the curriculum is culturally sensitive, it should also focus on the learning styles of the students in the classroom. Focusing on children’s’ different learning styles will reinforce that all children, if provided an appropriate learning environment, can cultivate their learning styles. It is also important to make curriculum and classroom accommodations and to consider a variety of student assessments. Multiple opportunities and programs need to be developed to meet the needs of students and their families.

As a future administrator, I believe the principal and staff members need to collaborate and work on instructional goals together. Petra E. Snowden and Richard A. Gorton agreed with Ralph Stogdill’s definition, which emphasized that leadership need not be limited to one individual, such as the school administrator,

but rather the focus of the leadership activities should be on increasing the performance effectiveness of the group (Snowden & Gorton, 2002, p.69). The responsibilities and contributions of each individual should be recognized and celebrated.

The school curriculum should be consistently analyzed and evaluated to improve student learning. The curriculum decisions are based on research, expertise of teachers, and student needs. I am a believer; if you set goals together, they are more attainable.

Organizational Leadership

An organizational leader promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment. I believe effective organizational leadership occurs when there is input from staff members, parents and the community. Organizations should be encouraged to remain open to the creative talents of its members and to innovation and improvements to best serve all involved clients. It is clear to me that all stakeholders should be encouraged and involved in decision-making affecting schools when appropriate. The public should be aware of student programs and activities taking place in schools. By supporting individual members, organizational learning can offer more promising results to a successful school change process. It builds a sense of community.

Shirley Hord identified the five dimensions of these organizational

learning communities as follows: (1) shared values and visions; (2) collective learning and application; (3) supportive and shared leadership; (4) supportive conditions; and (5) shared personal practice (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 197). In the learning organization context, all staff members should share leadership roles, although the principal remains the point person.

The administrator collaborates with teachers and has knowledge of student learning, teaching and student development to be able to make management decisions. Fiscal resources of the school must also be managed responsibly, efficiently and effectively to support the attainment of school goals.

The operational plans and procedures should be designed and managed by involvement of stakeholders. The vision and goals should be recognized, studied and managed to maximize opportunities for successful learning. Jay P. Goldman, editor of *The School Administrator*, stated that the West Des Moines superintendent since 1995, Les Omotani, recognizes that developing a shared sense of ownership for public education is substantially more complex and painstaking than tacking a mission statement to a wall and declaring the job done (Goldman, 1999, p.1). The school vision and mission statement should be regularly monitored and modified as needed.

Every student is entitled to a safe, clean and desirable learning environment. School records are maintained by school personnel and should be kept confidential. The school plant, equipment and support systems should be

monitored daily to ensure safety of the school population. Safety issues and concerns should be identified and resolved by stakeholders in a timely manner. Safety is an on-going process and safety policies should be reviewed and practiced daily by all stakeholders.

Collaborative Leadership

A collaborative leader promotes the success of all students by collaborating with staff members and developing partnerships with families and community members. By collaborating with stakeholders, we are responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources. Research suggests that the schools with the greatest student-learning going on are those that do not isolate teachers, but instead encourage professional dialogue and collaboration. Teaching in effective schools is a collective, rather than individual enterprise (Glickman, Gordon, & Gordon-Ross, 1998, p.17). I strongly believe in collaborating with all stakeholders to work on instructional goals. The complexity of school issues addressed by school leaders requires collaboration. Collaboration requires learning to listen to others, collectively reviewing outcomes, and responding to and partaking of relevant discussions.

Getting families and the community involved in the building goals are important. I will support and be involved in parental and community programs such as Parent Teacher Association meetings and School Based Council. It is necessary to get everyone involved to discuss building goals, concerns and

student needs. All stakeholders should be aware of student learning and programs taking place in schools.

I will respect school customs, cultures and ceremonies already intact. It is important to me in getting all families and community involved. Since culture is always changing, sharing and celebrating culture brings unity and a sense of belonging. I would encourage and invite the community to share their cultures and talents within the school building. It builds community awareness.

I am a firm believer that administrators should collaborate with staff members to meet school goals and objectives.

One superintendent emphasized in the study that collaborative decision-making, although difficult, has proven to facilitate school reforms that advance social justice with an emphasis on academic achievement for every child; higher-order democratic values exemplified by equality of input and equality of opportunity; and the notion of an "ethic of care," which combines caring, administration, and academic achievement. Collaborative decision-making is a worthy endeavor (Brunner, 1997, p.6).

I will promote team teaching and give opportunities for staff to develop collaborative skills together. Research suggests that successes are more likely to occur when people talk together regularly and frequently, working together, and teach one another about new ideas and possibilities (Little, 1986, p.3).

Community groups should be encouraged in assisting to strengthen school programs and to support school goals. Partnerships should be established with area businesses and institutions of higher education to help the school solve problems and achieve visionary goals. The public resources and funds should be reviewed to see that they are being used appropriately and wisely.

Ethical Leadership

An ethical leader promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner.

Dr. James P. Comer, Yale Child Student Center, Yale University Medical argues that attention to the social development of children should at least be a priority in schools as is academic development. He contends that the ability one's emotions in all kinds of situations is a key factor in success in life (Lucas, G., 2000, p.1).

I believe an administrator inspires all stakeholders through their actions. Respect is earned through being honest, treating others fairly and being enthused about student learning. I will protect the rights and confidentiality of students and staff.

When a principal gets involved in collaborating with staff members to work on education goals together, most stakeholders are usually inspired by this commitment. The principal's attitude and beliefs build a school climate. Leaders must know their values and beliefs, those of their community, and the ethical principles guiding action taken as a consequence of holding certain values to guide their actions and assist with problem solving. It was stated in a research study that a growing interest in ethics is not limited to typical leadership or administrative roles, but includes teachers and professors as well (Czaja & Lowe, 2000, p.7). I believe educational leaders need to model good conduct and ethical principles in the school environment and the community. Leaders should be able to articulate their beliefs and values when dealing with equity issues.

Formally a classroom teacher and currently teaching special education, I am eager to make sure all students feel they belong and are treated fairly. Ted and Nancy Sizer recently wrote, “Belonging is something that every adolescent should expect at school. Belonging, or the right to belong, is a moral right of adolescence” (Sizer & Sizer, 1999, p.116). I will encourage staff members to make accommodations and demonstrate ethical behavior towards all children throughout the building. If there are students not experiencing success, we need to look at students’ different learning styles, make curriculum and classroom accommodations, and use a variety of student assessments. We need to better prepare leaders and staff members to deal with equity issues. Demographic changes will continue to occur in the United States. Ethics defines the way we participate in the community around us. I feel there will be an increased need to extend the equity agenda to better serve all stakeholders.

Political Leadership

A political leader promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context. The unifying purpose for schools, individuals, and organizations that collaborate in the development of educational partnerships is best depicted by the much-quoted African proverb, “It takes an entire village to raise a child” (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000, p.116). Business-education partnerships are two-way voluntary relationships between schools and business organizations.

Such partnerships allow both schools and businesses to achieve goals. I believe partnerships are needed to address the academic and social needs of children in our changing world. Politics is a process through which individuals and groups openly express needs, interests and reconcile differences. Political Leadership is getting all stakeholders involved in the decision-making.

I believe employee empowerment does not work without frequent communication. I would speak informally with all school staff along with having monthly staff meetings. I would share all necessary information and include everyone in the decision-making process. Having the attitude that everyone in the building is as capable in decision-making as I am builds trust. A climate needs to be established where people understand that decision-making takes time but everyone's opinion counts.

The lines of communication with families and the community should be open and require ongoing dialogue. Individuals and constituency groups can reconcile divergent differences through consultation and negotiation. It was stated in a research study the number of school-community partnerships nationwide is soaring as school leaders capitalize on the potential benefits that can be gleaned from bringing schools, parents and community agencies together to help students learn (Pardini, 2001, p.3). Support groups such as Parent Teacher Organization, School Based Council and Business Partnerships should be recognized and supported by all stakeholders to help provide quality education for students.

The school community must operate within the framework of policies, laws and regulations. There should be ongoing dialogue among community members concerning trends, issues and potential change in the school environment. This policy needs to be well articulated to all stakeholders to provide quality education for all students.

Conclusion

I believe the six Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards are like puzzle pieces; without all the pieces, the puzzle is incomplete. My vision as an administrator is to have a balance of the six standards. Each standard plays an important role and should be present for all administrators to be effective. I foresee myself constantly reviewing these standards as an administrator. I will make every effort to implement the six standards so all children can and will learn.

I will promote student learning and staff professional growth in a safe and efficient environment. I believe in involving families and community members to support student learning. Acting with fairness and in an ethical manner is very important to me. Everyone should be treated equally, both students and staff. I see myself as a visionary, always looking for methods to improve as an administrator and doing what is best for the students and staff.

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