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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

The principal plays a pivotal role in developing and unifying the core beliefs of a staff to put children first. At the heart of the school's philosophy there should be the core belief that students come first. Benefiting students must be the focus or foundation for all decisions made in relationship to the operation of a school. The Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) are excellent guidelines to be utilized when creating an instructional environment that benefits students. The strength of ISSL is they are guidelines that provide direction; an infrastructure that can be used in any school environment. Regardless of the size, location or type of school, the standards remain an effective guide that can guide the school leader in bringing efficiency, effectiveness and instructional focus to a school system.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTORING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Master of Arts in Education

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by

Gregory B. Semler

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In the field of psychology, the discussion of nature versus nurture is often a common topic of debate. Those who are familiar with this issue typically restate the issue as nature and nurture; meaning one's environment and genetic make-up play a role in how we become what we become. As I consider how and why I developed into the person I am today, I often revisit this debate.

Without question, the experiences of my childhood and adult life have influenced my beliefs, habits, and practices. The challenges of childhood can sometimes do a great deal of harm to the eventual development of a person. It is also true that the challenges of childhood may allow one to become stronger. It is through such experiences that some in the adult world develop a true compassion for all people, and a life-long commitment to help others. A caring adult, an interested teacher, or an involved concerned principal can be such a critical factor in helping a young person find his or her way.

I am grateful to the teachers and principals that played a part in guiding me as a young person. The role that a teacher or a principal may play in the life of a young person can only be fully understood by the young person who has received the benefits of that attention. It is paramount that all educators understand and keep in mind how powerful and influential they can be in the development of a young person. I had two teachers in particular that helped me find self-worth. They believed in me, pushed me, supported me, looked out for me, and really made me believe I could become anything I wanted to become. To this day I still appreciate what they did for me.

Through my own experiences I think I better understand how challenging, yet rewarding life can be. I was raised in a single-parent home with five brothers and sisters. We lived in poverty; self-reliance was very important characteristic one had to have if

any of us were going to find any success in anything we did. My mother did the very best she could with the skills, background and training she had. She worked long hours and held many jobs that many would feel were beneath them. Witnessing her perseverance helped me understand that pride can be modeled in many ways. It was always my hope that my mother could find fulfillment in her life. When one struggles to pay the electric bill and lives in a home without hot water or a phone, fulfillment is often a secondary concern. These childhood experiences helped shape me because I became stronger; I gained insight into how hard life can be. My childhood experiences helped motivate me escape the poverty I lived in; my experiences also led me into the field of education. In the field of education I can contribute in helping children who face difficult times and challenges.

I am blessed to have a wonderful family; I appreciate my family more fully because of my past experiences. I understand there are a number of factors that may impact the overall development of what one becomes. We are all born with particular tendencies, however, it is how we react to our environment that ultimately trains and shapes us.

A coach, a principal or a teacher has a wonderful opportunity to play a crucial role in the life of a child. Students who can be helped to understand that they are special and capable, no matter what their circumstances can reach beyond their immediate limitations. I have taken great pride in being a teacher, reaching out to all students, and helping them to become the best that they can be. Those that work in education are given a blessed task. The task of being a strong advocate for all children is one I will continue when I become the principal of a school.

“State and federal agencies, local school boards, and individual schools often set broad educational goals, applicable to all courses and toward which all teachers are expected to direct their instruction” (Estes, Gunter & Schwab, 1999, p. 9). Considering the many directives and concerns related to student performance, student success, teacher evaluation and accountability, one must strongly consider the paradigm shift of the traditional view of the principal to what will be asked of the principal in the future. Principals have a number of responsibilities related to their job, the most important is the role of instructional leader. In the future one must hope that the principal works in an environment that allows focus on important role of being an instructional leader.

Without question education will continue to evolve in the United States. The growth of private schools, learning centers, home schooling, school consolidations, and high-stakes testing are many issues that will continue to alter the role and the operation of school systems. Predicting how and in what way schools will change in the future is not an easy question to answer. For example, it may have been hard to believe that the number of Iowa schools could have changed so drastically in the last 90 years. According to David R. Reynolds in *There Goes The Neighborhood* (1999) in 1913, Iowa had almost 14,000 country school districts and subdistricts, most with their own locally controlled one-room schools. Currently Iowa has nearly 400 school districts; that number may continue to be reduced in the years ahead. The reduction of the number of schools in Iowa brought many related changes. Those in the field of education must adjust and evolve with these changes. The principal must be aware of and constantly work at processing the changes a school faces. The principal must always ask the question of what is best for students.

The principal plays a pivotal role in developing and unifying the core beliefs of a staff to put children first. At the heart of the school's philosophy there should be the core belief that students come first. Benefiting students must be the focus or foundation for all decisions made in relationship to the operation of a school. The Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) are excellent guidelines to be utilized when creating an instructional environment that benefits students. The strength of ISSL is they are guidelines that provide direction; an infrastructure that can be used in any school environment. Regardless of the size, location or type of school, the standards remain an effective guide that can guide the school leader in bringing efficiency, effectiveness and instructional focus to a school system. Moreover, once in place, the leadership standards help create a foundation for the school to use as there are changes in personnel and or administration.

An additional benefit of incorporating the ISSL into the school system is that they provide a core set of beliefs for the principal and staff to return to when faced with specific problems or concerns. When a problem or concern arises, it is not the time to begin contemplating, "How do we handle this situation?" By incorporating the ISSL into the school philosophy problems can be handles more efficiently and fairly. The incorporation of the ISSL into a given school's structure is not simply for reactionary purposes. It is a progressive set of clearly defined principles to establish a productive school where all children learn well.

The Iowa Standard's for School Leaders include standards for Visionary Leadership, Organizational Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Ethical Leadership, and Political Leadership. The standards are a fundamental guide to be used by the



principal to create the best learning environment possible, ultimately helping all students learn and achieve to the best of their individual potential.

### Organizational Leadership

*A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment (Iowa Department of Education, 2001).*

For a school to fully realize the objective of providing each student the best possible education, the principal must be an organizational leader. By organizing a school and staff in a way that allows the student and community needs to be met, the principal is facilitating the growth of a school climate that maximizes the potential for student learning. Having policies in place to deal with conflicts and difficult issues will also enhance the development of the desired learning climate.

When one considers the role of schools and the educational process in the development of young people, it is impossible to deny that organizational leadership is an important and critical responsibility. It is a responsibility that schools must constantly be prepared to examine, evaluate and determine appropriate adjustments to be made on behalf of students and society. There are a number of variables that must be in place to provide a quality educational environment such as a dedicated and caring staff, involved parents, and a school culture that is geared toward helping all students become successful learners who are well prepared for the future. There are times in life and in the field of

education when one must do the very best with what is available. It is important for schools to utilize resources and creative ideas to effectively educate children well.

The principal's role is absolutely fundamental in working to make the best of each given situation. The principal must understand his or her leadership role and embrace it. The example set by the principal concerning awareness of student's needs and his or her personal work ethic ought to be exemplary. "An administrator's leadership to a large extent determines how successful his or her organization will be in delivering services and winning community support" (Corderio & Cunningham, 2000, p. 153). A principal must be trained and prepared to deal with many tasks. A principal must also understand there are issues and tasks that go beyond his or her training; consequently it is critical that the principal is aware of services and specialists that can provide assistance and expertise related to all aspects of running a school. Special education issues, curriculum development, lunch services, athletic funding, and other concerns are all possible areas that the principal may want to involve a number of sources and experts that can assist with direction, input and information. A principal who understands the power of collaboration and an empowered staff greatly enhances his or her ability to be an effective building leader.

### Collaborative Leadership

*A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources (Iowa Department of Education, 2001).*

Being a building leader is not just a title. For the principal to be effective maintaining what is working well and making changes where needed, he or she must have the ability to be a consensus builder. A principal must develop the personal skills needed to work with staff in a positive, supportive and non-threatening way. The skill of consensus building is important as it relates to the stakeholders, the students and the staff. Members of the community must be invited into the school for visits; they must be included on school improvement committees. There must be constant communication among the parents, the school, and the community. The principal and the school must take proactive measures to build support, interest and involvement in the community. The ability to build a consensus among the staff and community is pivotal in creating a climate of change in any given school. One may find districts that are in need of little immediate change, but eventually all schools must evolve by meeting or responding to the changing demands of society.

If a staff believes in the school's mission, the work effort and efficiency of the building will be greatly enhanced. That belief in the common mission of the school can be developed by the principal showing trust in staff. The principal can establish this trust by allowing teachers and staff independence, support and involvement. "The principal is the key to building a trusting environment. Trust begins with the principal. According to John Greer and Paula Short in *Leadership in Empowered Schools*, if the principal presents herself or himself as the only authority in the school, then a trusting environment is not possible" (2002 p. 63). A principal must have faith in the ability of his or her staff. If a staff embraces this trust, they are empowered to act and teach with confidence. This does not mean that the principal will agree with all things that each teacher does, but it

does mean that there will always be a way of working through issues in a professional and productive manner.

It is also very important to understand that the concept of leadership does not necessarily fall on one person in a school environment. Teachers and principals understand it is fundamental to develop and maintain an atmosphere to allow all those in the building with leadership ability to come forward. Linda Lambert (1998) suggests in her book, *Building Leadership Capacity in Schools*, that “When we equate the powerful concept of leadership with the behaviors of one person we are limiting the achievement of broad based participation by a community or society” (p. 5). The principal that has the ability to create shared leadership, is a confidant, effective and a true leader.

There are many steps that can be taken by the principal to provide leadership in his or her building. A principal must role model the importance of continuous improvement. Through reading, the principal will remain current with educational trends, innovations and initiatives. To provide the best educational experience for each student, the principal must be aware of what is happening in the field of education. Even if new ideas are not gleaned from current readings, reading is still a means for the principal to consider past premises and practices. The principal is also in a position to facilitate reading among the staff. The principal may facilitate reading among staff by providing books for exchange or by ordering periodicals to be placed in the teacher’s lounge for all staff to read. But most certainly, the principal can be an example to the entire staff concerning reading materials that are related to the field of education. It may also be suggested that the principal make the staff aware of the number of web sites available related to the field of education. This constant focus on additional information

as it relates to education creates an environment that stresses the need to constantly improve. No matter how good a teacher may be at his or her craft, everyone benefits by seeking new knowledge and skills. The master teacher is never satisfied and is always focused on making any improvements to benefit the learning of students. It is also beneficial for the principal to pursue readings that are not directly related to education. There is a great deal to be gained from reading books about any number of subjects. The end result is that a well-read person has a greater knowledge basis to utilize when he or she makes decisions effecting the education of young people. Ultimately, reading enhances all decisions and actions of a leader. The modeling that the principal provides through reading is important as well. The students, staff, and community may be greatly influenced by a principal that promotes reading, shares what he or she reads, and recognizes the importance of reading through ceremonies, reading contests, and book fairs.

It could also be argued that the principal must look at many ideas when creating and maintaining a quality school environment. One may consider a variety of management styles that create the optimum learning environment on behalf of students. A term often used in education is empowerment. There are probably a number of interpretations of this term. Most educators understand empowerment to mean that teachers play a role in the decision making process and the overall direction of the school. There are many ideas and theories bantered about that would allow a school system to move in the direction of the empowerment concept.

One of the models for empowerment is site-based management. John Greer and Paula Short in *Leadership in Empowered Schools (2002)* wrote: Site-based management

has at least three different meanings. First and foremost, it implies decentralization of the decision-making process from the district to the building level, without implying how much is enough. Second, site-based management implies an attempt to match educational programs to specific characteristics of students, teachers, and the community in which the school is located. Third, for many educators site-based management implies participative management. It allows use of the knowledge and energy of participants—teachers, parents, and students (p. 4).

For site-based management to be successful there are several aspects that must be in place. Among those aspects one would hope to find a motivated, trained, organized, and involved staff. Site-based management and the decisions made under its guise must be for the improvement of the school. The principal must understand the notion that he or she is sharing power, not giving up power, simply sharing. The entire staff must be given the time, positive encouragement, and finally the opportunity for being involved in the process. Site-based management ought to enhance the job of the teacher, not overburden the teacher with simply more duties because they chose to get involved in improving the school.

There are a number of programs and materials available that could assist the principal in implementing a site-based management program in his or her school. I think the strength and the benefit of the site-based philosophy is that it involves teachers and ultimately uses their strengths. It allows the strong teacher to lead and play a role that enhances the teaching and learning environment in a way that helps students learn. Empowered teachers are satisfied teachers who will take ownership of the improvement of their school. One certainty is that all working in education should constantly question

what they are doing on behalf of the students. From each new management idea, the principal may gain insight or create a new paradigm filtered through an old concept or idea. By being aware of different methods and styles of leadership, the principal can help ensure that he or she is facilitating the best possible school environment.

Not only must the principal consider ways of empowering teachers, the principal must also be aware of the current political climate related to the confidence that the general public has in the public school. Public opinion has grown increasingly demanding in seeking school choice in the past decade. "According to the government's National Center of Education Statistics, in 1995, 69% of those surveyed favored allowing parents to choose the public school that their child attends. In 1996, 15% of those surveyed by the NCED, expressed very little confidence in public schools, a number that increased to a full 20%, just two years later." (Patterson, 2001, p. 38). According to proponents of school choice, school choice creates competition and competition among schools creates better schools. One ought to question the logic of that argument. Nonetheless, the debate will continue. The principal must be prepared to defend the performance or lack of performance by his or her own school district.

The debate related to testing and overall school performance will continue into the future. The principal plays a critical part in making sure that the testing is appropriate and serving the purpose intended. In the March, 2003 edition of *NEA Today*, Alain Jehlen reported on a study conducted at the University of Arizona reported that in the 28 states that have adopted high-stakes testing, the results have not had much of an impact. Some states did claim success, but in test scores only. In some of these states there was an increase in dropout rates and a reduction in graduation rates (Jehlen, p. 9). The principal

must be aware of concerns such as narrowing of the curriculum, meeting the social and developmental needs of each student, the school's use of standards and benchmarks, as well as overall student success once they leave school. Giving each of these areas of concern the proper amount of attention will take vigilance and the ability to make difficult decisions. A critical step in making important decisions is the collection and use of appropriate and meaningful data.

In the future, the principal will need to be able to provide data on behalf of his or her school to the stakeholders. There may be anecdotal evidence one can discuss concerning school performance, but there is no question that schools of the future will be data driven. The ability of the principal to create structures for data collection and the ability to make constructive use of that data will be paramount. It is also critical that the principal has the ability to present data in way that allows the stakeholders to understand the many variables that must be considered when making inferences related to that data. To simply print test scores in the school newsletter is not an acceptable method of sharing data. The precise nature of the type of tests, who was tested, and with whom test results are compared, are all factors to consider. The role of testing will take on incredible significance in the years to come when reporting school achievement to parents and the community. As school improvement is contemplated, testing is one of the means thought to be fundamental to school improvement, by those who develop educational policy. Testing is also accepted and considered important in the process of producing data that will help schools make decisions related to the overall mission and performance of students and staff.



### Visionary Leadership

*A school administrator is an educational leader who 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 (Iowa Department of Education, 2001).*

The core beliefs of the school are to be modeled by the principal in all that he or she does. The principal is in a position that allows him or her opportunity to collaborate with community members, students and staff to benefit students and facilitate school improvement. It is the principal's role to facilitate and maintain a shared vision among staff and community. The principal must promote and protect this vision allowing all students in the district to receive the best opportunity possible to be successful and prepared.

In every school setting a principal will find there is always room for improvement. When one does find a district where all students are achieving well and community's needs are being met, perhaps little adjustment needs to be made. The principal should go into this setting understanding his or her role is to maintain what is good and look to change areas that could use improvement. Every school must be continuously seeking ways to improve no matter what the current status is. A school, a teacher, and a principal must always believe that student achievement and overall school improvement can improve. A principal must also be prepared to deal with a school setting where the school is not performing well, and where the morale is low and the expectations are even lower. In such a setting the principal must facilitate a long-term

plan for improvement. In the March 2001, issue of *Educational Leadership*, Carol Johnson and Ross Taylor outline how a Minnesota public school developed a comprehensive school improvement plan. At the basis of the schools philosophy was the notion that public schools ought to be pushing all students forward not screening some children out.

Following are the factors that were critical for the school system to reach success: First, ***Early intervention*** involves pre-school, out of school reading programs, clear goals for reading achievement at an early age. Second, ***Attendance***; the correlation between achievement and attendance is strong. Poor attendance is the first step toward dropping out. They found that students that attended school 95% of the time were more than twice as likely to pass the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests. The key ingredient increasing attendance was involving the family. ***Class size***. Class size was reduced to nineteen students per class. ***Quality instruction***. Teaching strategies were investigated and incorporated. The business community was canvassed for both funds and knowledge, experiential and hands-on learning became the norm. ***Expectations of excellence***. The district no longer accepted a narrow curriculum, and a “dumb down,” focus of content. Data was used to measure results, and report to the public. ***Good health***. The school worked with HMOs to allow those unable to afford health care to receive care. The high school changed its starting time from 7:15 a.m. to 8:40 a.m. Finally, the school used ***multiple measures***. Accountability is not about a single test. Student observations, analyzing work, watching students interact, how they transfer

knowledge, and sharing information about what works and does not were also very critical in assessing the learning of students (Johnson & Taylor, 2001, p. 58).

One can not read about this school's success without getting excited about the powerful and positive role the school can play in the lives of students. With a proper plan in place, a motivated and dedicated staff, great things can be accomplished. The principal ought to play a central role in bringing about the changes that meet the needs of the students. It should be understood that change and improvements will succeed only if the plan is well thought out. One must make sure that the goals are easily understood, clearly promulgated, and structured in a way that they can be a measured and monitored. The principal ought to relish the opportunity to bring about positive change, be willing to face difficult decisions and include influential and effective teachers in any needed change process. The principal must lead by example. If a new program or initiative is to be effective the principal must not waver in his or her support of the program. The principal ought to also model a strong example of exemplary work. A staff that sees the principal literally working in the trenches will be a staff that sees credibility in all the actions of that principal. The principal must always be cognizant of this role. Great things rarely happen in a vacuum. By being prepared and understanding that each school culture may be different, an effective principal will provide the leadership and direction to ensure student success.

### Political Leadership

*A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all*

*students by understanding, responding to and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context (Iowa Department of Education, 2001).*

The role of the public school continues to evolve. The family structure is changing. The number of children born into poverty each year is alarming. The number of children born into single parent homes each year is a pattern of concern as well. Thirty seven percent of American Children, 27 million, live in low-income families. Forty percent of U.S. children under age six, 9 million children, live in families with incomes below 200 % of the poverty line, which is \$27,722 for a family of three. Many of the concerns of “near poor” low-income families overlap with those of the poor, such as the need for well-paying jobs and access to affordable quality child and health care (*National Center For Children In Poverty, 2002, p. 1*).

Some parents are ill equipped to provide even the basic needs to their own children. Schools are often a means and sometimes the only means to provide the critical tools that can help many of these students escape from cycles that perpetuate poverty and accept underachievement. It is part of the principal’s mission to reach out to all students and provide the best educational opportunities and support the school can offer. If that support means facilitating free and reduced lunch sign-up or procuring appropriate gym shorts for needy students, the principal should be proactive in accomplishing those tasks. Students from impoverished backgrounds and/or broken-homes face particular challenges. In the educational philosophy of all principals, there should be consideration for these students and their special needs. A principal should play a role in helping staff fully understand the help students from difficult backgrounds may need.

The principal must take special care of this portion of the student population.

There may be teachers because of their background and limited training who do not realize some of the special challenges that their students may face in their home environment. These teachers may have a hunch, but the specifics may be so far removed from their own training and background that they do not take these variables into account as they work with students or develop assignments. For example, if a classroom teacher assigns specific work related to the Internet, they may simply assume that all students have access at home. If it is a research assignment to be completed out of class, the students who have access to a home computer will more than likely be able to produce a better product. The skilled and insightful teacher is aware of these variables. If not, the building principal must keep a vigilant watch over such situations. The principal could facilitate opening the computer lab for students for extended time periods. Perhaps, the idea of checking out laptops is also a consideration. Technology offers amazing possibilities, yet technology as it relates to computers and Internet access also creates and exacerbates the gap between the students who have financial resources and the students that do not. For long term success for all students, the principal must be an advocate for students with particular financial limitations. According to Alfred Tatum in the October 2001 issue of *Principal Leadership*, “Students must experience academic success, develop and maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness to challenge the status quo” (p. 28).

A school administrator must understand that the school environment must be structured in a way that best serves all in the community. Decisions made that may have an impact on the community need to be well researched and planned. Perhaps a school is

considering opening a pre-school day care, one may want to consider how that might affect the income of local private baby sitters. Communicating with the community is critical as well. The stakeholders must be informed of school decisions or even issues that are under consideration. Communication with the community is a critical aspect related to creating credibility for the school and administrator. The means of communication can be varied, such as using a local cable channel, a school newsletter, notes home to parents, or even involving a local newspaper. The principal must play an active role in informing the community of the school's mission. Moreover, the principal will play a crucial part in the school's report to the community. The principal who has a clear dialogue with community representatives will be in a position to lead with the leaders of the community as opposed to being in a defensive non-progressive position.

#### Instructional Leadership

*A school administrator is an educational leader who 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 (Iowa Department of Education, 2001).*

There are many issues facing the schools of today that require special attention. Most recently brain research is finding its way into the schools of America. Researchers are beginning to understand that much of our behavior is shaped by unconscious beliefs about key aspects of learning such as intelligence and knowledge. Beliefs of this type are often referred to as implicit beliefs because they represent unconscious personal beliefs about the world (Bruning, Schraw & Ronning, 1999).

“By linking what we know about how the brain works with a framework for teaching and learning, we can improve the likelihood that various education reforms will actually help students learn—including students with special needs” (Hardiman, 2001, p. 58). There is a great deal of new research that is being generated related to brain functioning and learning. However the bulk of this research is not making it to the teachers and into the classrooms.

A basic precept of brain-based research is that learning is best achieved when linked with previous knowledge. Mariale Hardiman (2001) argued that linking five dimensions together, educators could create a number of best practices for teaching all children. Dimension one is the staff must hold a positive and open attitude. Dimension two is the staff needs to be part of the process of acquiring the knowledge and information used. Dimension three is the staff must extend and refine knowledge related to brain-based learning and teaching. Dimension four is that the teachers must use the knowledge to create meaningful lessons. Finally, dimension five is students must be taught habits of the mind. Meaning the students must be able of monitor their own thinking. They should be helped to understand their own learning style, allowing them the chance to approach each new assignment with their own personal learning strengths. Brain-based research is an available information that can be referred to in an effort to enhance the learning of students (Hardiman, 2001).

An aggressive and open principal must bring information and practices like brain-based learning to his or her staff. While some will be resistant, others will be pleased to have a strong principal who is truly a visionary and instructional leader. In the years to come, more research will be produced that will benefit the learning of students. The

professional teacher and principal will make it a priority to stay abreast of such information and incorporate it where and when appropriate.

Brain-based learning is just one concept to be considered when the principal is examining issues and research related to school improvement. The use of data to make decisions concerning student achievement is extremely important. The principal must make sure that decisions about instruction are based in sound research. Prior to making changes in curriculum, methods of instruction, or even the number of periods the school uses in a day, the principal must have data to support those decisions. If no data exists, the principal must devise a plan and begin collecting information and documenting current methods, test scores and other related data that will help him or her make a confident decision related to possible changes needed. Collecting data will help with making decisions for school improvement as well as allow the stakeholders the opportunity to better understand decisions in which they may play a part.

To help other educators achieve their learning goals and to lead school reforms, principals need opportunities to learn, reflect, and change (McCay, 2001, p. 76). “How can principals change and grow on the job while simultaneously leading the processes of change in a school?” McCay (2001) argued that principals often become isolated in their job because time spent with staff may sometimes be viewed as a boss employee relationship rather than a collegial one. Teachers often turn to one another for support on a daily basis. The principal on the other hand may find it difficult to share with the general staff concerns especially issues related to someone on the general staff. Additionally, the principal is in a position that requires him or her to guide, critique and sometimes reprimand staff members. At times these actions can certainly make a



principal feel a bit out of the supportive loop that teachers naturally provide for one another. Additionally, as the principal tends to the daily and long term tasks of running a school, it may be difficult to find avenues for discovering new ideas.

McCay (2001) argues that the principals need feedback from fellow administrators. Perhaps a regional support network is one possible answer to this concern. Contact with colleagues outside of the district may provide the chance to exchange ideas and practices, or simply to provide emotional support. Another measure that McCay (2001) felt was an important step to be taken by the principal was to continue to teach. The opportunity to teach may not be in the traditional school setting; it may be teaching at a junior college or a presenting to club or community organization. Any teaching opportunities will help the principal remain grounded. A principal that is allowed the time to continue to teach students in a classroom setting also retains the satisfaction derived from working with young people in the classroom. A principal who remains in the classroom in some form will be better connected to the student body. The benefits of the principal maintaining a connection in the classroom are immeasurable. The demands of the principal in other areas of school operation are very immediate, yet the effective principal will make classroom involvement one of his or her priorities. One might argue that it is not always going to be possible to be a principal and still serve in a teaching capacity. Others may contend that the principal is still a teacher; even though the classroom has changed as have the students, however, the ability to motivate, teach, and to garner satisfaction from this special opportunity remains firmly in place.

There are many leadership styles. The principal must find the style that matches his personality and yet is still effective. It is imperative that the principal is constantly

examining other exemplary leaders. The principal ought to ask what does he or she do that makes him or her so effective? How did they develop such clear credibility, influence and effectiveness? By constantly self-examining oneself, the educational leader can find ways of improving all aspects of his or her ability to lead. A leader that is satisfied with the status quo may be a leader that is headed for failure.

### Ethical Leadership

*A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (Iowa Department of Education, 2001).*

There is no question that the principal serves as a role model for the student body, the staff, and the community. He or she must constantly be aware of the importance of this role. The concept of being a role model is foundational for school operations, ethical treatment of students and staff, professional growth, as well as continuous evaluation of all decisions related to student achievement.

An ideal principal is wise, fair, and calm under pressure. A principal that does not have these particular skills should work at enhancing them. A staff and community must feel confident that the person in charge can deal with difficult situations without losing focus. Leadership in a crisis is critical; the principal must be prepared to assume that role. A principal can enhance those skills through training and reading. Being aware of information and trends that may help in the development of these skills is very important for the effective principal. In the past few years the concept of emotional intelligence has been discussed as a way to better understand why there are those that seem to have some

of these critical abilities and skills. If not blessed with high emotional intelligence, one can work at improving this capability.

Effective principals like other, “effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: they all have a high degree of emotional intelligence” (Crow, Hausman & Sperry, 2000, p. 5). Some may be blessed with emotional intelligence; others develop emotional intelligence over time. A principal would greatly benefit whom they associate with by working at improving his or her own emotional intelligence. High emotional intelligence will allow the principal to stop short of quick and ill-advised decisions as well as better understand the differences in staff and students. Simply being aware of the concept of emotional intelligence allows the principal to be sensitive to the needs of all who are related to the school mission whether it is students, staff or community. As there is no perfect leadership style, there are no perfect leaders. All that one can hope to do is their very best on a daily basis. If one keeps this simple maxim in mind, the school will be successful.

### Conclusion

Many contend that the responsibility being placed upon today’s schools are much too demanding. There is no question that the ever-changing context of today’s schools create many and varied demands for educators and their schools. A principal must embrace this responsibility; he or she must seek ways to strengthen school, community and staff. A principal must constantly focus on creating the best learning environment possible. What is best for the student is a question that must always be asked. Elliot Aronson wrote in *Nobody left to hate, Teaching Compassion After Columbine* (2000) “we must find ways to transform the atmosphere in our schools so that there would be no

losers, so there would be no one left to hate” (p. 178). Keeping this statement in mind is an important reminder of how important and varied the responsibility of the school is in the overall development of young people. Learning compassion, kindness and the importance of including others is and will continue to be part of the mission of schools. To be in education is an honor and a privilege. It is exciting, challenging and rewarding. A teacher and a principal must always remember how influential and important they are in the life of the student. The principal and the school must work tirelessly to uphold the obligation and honor of providing the best learning experience possible for each and every student who enters the doors of the school every day.

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