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## An administrative role in the secondary school: A reflective essay

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## An administrative role in the secondary school: A reflective essay

### Abstract

As we approach the turn of the century and are involved in so many plans for the future of education, it is difficult not to wonder which terms will be overused at that point in time. We are focused on "global awareness", "the year 2000", and "a technological future". A personal belief and philosophy statement about one's role in administration cannot be formed without thinking in these terms and looking at the role of education and administration.

AN ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL  
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper  
Presented to  
The Department of Educational Administration  
and Counseling  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
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by  
Cinde L. Haskins  
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## Reflective Paper

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As we approach the turn of the century and are involved in so many plans for the future of education, it is difficult not to wonder which terms will be overused at that point in time. We are focused on "global awareness", "the year 2000", and "a technological future". A personal belief and philosophy statement about one's role in administration cannot be formed without thinking in these terms and looking at the role of education and administration.

An educator needs to grow philosophically with the changes in the educational format, including national, state, regional, and district changes. Solid underpinnings in teacher education give the bases to philosophies that can and should change with the needs of our society.

Re-reading the following personal philosophy statement of effective teaching constituted the beginning of my awareness of personal growth and knowledge of self: An effective educator knows and understands each student on an individual basis. He/she learns each student's strengths, channels them properly and strengthens the weaknesses through motivation and

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extra attention. An effective educator follows the state, district, and school curriculum guidelines in order to ensure that his/her students absorb all information that is required during a specific school year (C. L. Haskins, personal statement, May, 1973). That is quite an encapsulated and narrow-visioned statement. The purpose of including this previous philosophy is to explain that in the last twenty years, a combination of teaching, parenting, work in the community, schooling, and leadership has changed the way in which I perceive a goal for the classroom. My goal in 1973 was to reach each of my 125 students individually and to help them reach the curricular goals for the school year. My goal in 1993 is to look at the broad picture of education and to guide all students toward a goal of life-long learning.

### Educational Leadership

A present-day vision for an administrator looks at the big picture of education. The day-to-day agenda is critical in the leadership of a school, but an administrator has a multi-faceted position. This vision looks past the present year and toward the next

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generation's needs and expectations in education. The leader of the schools today and in the future have to be approachable on a number of levels of interaction. The principal's office is not the only area where he/she is visible. The principal is a leader/facilitator who interacts with and is approachable by students, parents, the community, and the staff, on a daily basis.

An educational leader is an individual who accepts the authoritative expectations of others to responsibly guide the activities and enhance the performance of an organization (Guthrie and Reed, 1991). Leaders of the future will learn on-the-job. They will be self-designed individuals. A first-year principal will begin a position with his/her philosophies and methods in place. These philosophies and methods may change form depending on the circumstances. A principal could feel strongly concerning a particular event but realize that circumstances may pave the way for him/her to change opinion. Administration with an open mind that is flexible to change is important. Leadership skills come from the countless positive and negative choices that administrators make, from the demands and opportunities

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they meet, and from the conflicts and victories they experience along the way (D. R. Jackson, class discussion, September 9, 1992).

The key to leadership is knowing how and when to respond to situations that call for guidance. The work place will contain two phenomena; the institution with its roles and expectations fulfilling the goals of the system, and the individuals with personalities and need dispositions who inhabit the system (Getzels, 1977). The individuals will have to be categorized by the administrator as fitting into a maturity level. Labeling the maturity level will enable the administrator to decide which style of leadership is appropriate for a specific situation (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977). The maturity levels are low, low to moderate, moderate to high, and high. The correct form of leadership style, task (direction), and relationship (support) behaviors are then determined for each maturity level. "Telling" is for low maturity. These people need specific directions and supervision. "Selling" is for low to moderate maturity. These people are willing to take responsibility but need direction.



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"Participating" is for moderate to high maturity. These people have ability but lack self-confidence.

"Delegating" is for high maturity. Little direction is needed for this group.

Along with leadership style arrives the notion of power bases. Power bases may influence a staff's behavior at the four levels of maturity. Beginning at a low level of maturity, "coercive power" may motivate staff to avoid punishment; "connection power" may illicit compliance to avoid punishment or to gain rewards; "reward power" may influence behavior because of the access to rewards; "legitimate power" comes from the leader being able to influence staff on the basis of his/her position; "referent power" can be attained because the staff likes or admires the administrator; "information power" is obtained when a staff looks to its leader for information because of desire to improve; "expert power" is recognized because the leader has expertise and knowledge deemed important by the staff (Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 1979).

A leader/administrator needs to keep relationship knowledge as a permanent fixture in his/her thinking.

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He/she may make style decisions based on maturity and perception many times during the day. Not being able to refer to literature for each decision, it is recommended to retain these skills on relationships as part of a natural processing and decision-making style.

Administrative leadership theories are often complicated and difficult to dissect, probably because leadership is defined differently by experts in the leadership field, educational administrators, teachers, parents, and students. My vision of leadership, that I will carry with me, is a combination of social control (experiencing), action (doing), and projection (visualizing). I will visualize my actions in the combined areas of socialization, managing, evaluation, and training (Reed, 1990). The aspects of myself that I inject into these four areas will be my administrative leadership approach.

An administrator's focus is, of course, on the students. Each child should have an equal opportunity to an equal education that will enable that child to function as a necessary and worthwhile citizen. Our world is increasingly complex, ever-changing, and fast-

paced. Students need to exit a 13-year program of education with more and different kinds of skills to meet these constant changes. As the changes in the community, nation, and the world are not going to slow down upon graduation from high school, our students need to be knowledgeable about what it means to be a life-long learner. We need to instill in the students a desire to continue to improve themselves and keep up the pace of modern and future thoughts, ideas, and technologies.

### Technology for Learning

Technology from the classroom to the real world should be a concern of a present-day administrator. Too often our students walk out of class ill-equipped to apply their new knowledge to real-world situations and contexts. Also too frequently, the classroom examines ideas out of context of many real-world considerations. Technology is breaking down the walls between the classroom and the real world. Computerized mathematic, scientific, language, or foreign language simulations, for example, can bring real-world dilemmas to the

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student before he/she is confronted with them (Kozma and Johnston, 1991).

Daily computer use is an integral part of the instructional process, not an add-on. Students use computers to meet essential instructional objectives required in most basic school curricula. Use of software encourages higher-order thinking skills and applied learning skills. Multi-year, continuous computer use promotes self-paced learning. If each classroom is geared for a wide span of ages and abilities, each student has access to appropriate activities and software (Butzin, 1991).

Restructuring schools for the integration of technology is not just a principal's decision, but a district decision. Educators should remember that to apply technology effectively one must first organize to use it (Ray, 1991). Sadly enough, this decision cannot be one person's alone. If a principal is pro-technology but has no followers, his/her district may discover itself at a dead end. Technology in education will not evolve without administrative support at both the local building and central office level. The

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principal must be the main catalyst for technological change. He/she must have the ability to understand the benefits for developing and implementing educational technology. Having recognized the benefits, the principal's enthusiasm will more than likely be transmitted to others. The committees and groups of faculty, parents, students, and other interested citizens can then address the challenges that will bring about a stronger instructional program (Decker and Krajewski, 1985). Each administrator needs to see the importance of technology in education and work, by way of organized integration, to accumulate the resources needed, such as a substantial amount of computers, a satellite dish, a compact laser disc, video cassette recorders, close circuit television and camera, robotics, software, and of course, the training for the teachers. Knowledgeable districts begin with teacher training. Hardware, software, money and working space are the greatest obstacles to effective use of computers. A strong leader will provide leadership in finding methods to make the restructuring a success ("Overcoming," 1991).

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We need to look at educational goals in a global nature. The world of science is able to make global predictions concerning weather, atmospheric changes, and disasters, so in our field of education we should attempt to make predictions about economy, jobs, family structure, and health issues. All of these predictors shape the way in which we approach education. Our goal for our children in a global outlook should be adaptability. Students should be prepared for change and should know how to adapt to a shift in the economy, job, and location of the job. This skill of flexibility is attained by learning how to think critically and solve problems.

### Curriculum and Instruction

An administrator is a leader of teachers. He/she knows that curriculum and instruction are separate entities. In the learning-teaching act, decisions about what to teach (curriculum) and how to teach it (instruction) must be reconciled and unified. It is in the learning-teaching act that supervision finds its focus and direction (Glickman, 1992). Changes in educational theories come about from change in

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society. What do the students need now, in order to participate in the future? A leader of leaders (teachers) needs to know what changes are being discussed and planned for in each area of study. Knowledge of what is changing or lacking in a school's curricula is the responsibility of the principal (Dobensteiner, class discussion, September 13, 1993).

An effective principal "stretches" his/her faculty to reach beyond the day-to-day teaching of curriculum (R. H. Decker, class discussion, July 17, 1992). An effective teacher stretches when he or she takes an active interest in each student, teaches to the ability of each student, is enthusiastic, constantly checks for understanding of the students, follows the progress of each student individually, is approachable by all and friendly to all, and makes parental contact with messages of concern and good news. Elements that encourage the teacher to "stretch" are the satisfiers of achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and work itself (Herzberg, 1959).

An effective principal is an effective evaluator. A principal does not need to know content areas in order

to observe and evaluate. Clear and coherent instruction, a variety of materials, enthusiasm, clear objectives, acceptance of student ideas, and thinking/questioning skills are teacher characteristics which are easily improved upon by observation. Principals can also detect misbehavior and apathy of students, poor teacher planning, poor classroom management, sarcasm or criticism, poor attendance, poor record keeping, and lack of extra school involvement (Weldy, 1979).

There are a variety of models of instructional skills that increase student achievement. A six-step model in instructional functions includes daily review, presenting new content, practice, feedback with correctives, independent practice, and weekly or monthly reviews. All are functions that effective teachers will practice (Rosenshine, 1971). In a similar mode, telling students the "what", "why", and "how", of the lesson, giving examples, providing practice, giving feedback, having students summarize the lesson, reviewing, modeling, and checking for understanding are



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instructional skills that all teachers should possess (Hunter, 1982).

Teachers make important decisions about lessons and these decisions affect student learning. Decisions about content, time, pacing, group size, and activities are all pre-instructional factors. During-instruction factors occur when all of the planning comes together. Time on task, time management, academic learning time, monitoring success, giving directions, monitoring the class as a whole, questioning, and wait time should be attended to during each class period by the effective teacher. Climate factors add to a successful classroom environment. Using common sense, developing a safe and orderly atmosphere, developing cooperative learning environments, and communicating expectations will enhance the during-instruction factors. Post-instructional factors of congruent tests, grades, and informal feedback enable the success of a teacher (Berliner, class discussion, July 16, 1992).

Evaluation in education should be designed to ensure the improvement of teacher effectiveness. Two ways to improve teacher effectiveness are to improve the

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way in which teachers are trained and to improve the way in which teachers are evaluated (Medley, 1979). An evaluation system must have validity (truthfulness), reliability (consistency), inter-rater reliability (more than one evaluator arriving at the same conclusion), and intra-reliability (consistency within yourself, as an evaluator). Effective evaluation must derive from effective goals of an evaluator program. Developing trust and credibility as an evaluator, identifying effective teacher performance, analyzing lesson design, observing, recording, and reporting job performance, conducting effective evaluative conferences, developing growth plans, and demonstrating understanding of the legal aspects of evaluation are seven goals of an effective evaluator program (R. H. Decker, class discussion, July 20, 1992).

Ownership is an important facet of evaluation. If the person to be evaluated has input into the evaluation instrument or has input into a personal growth pattern, the acceptance and results of the evaluative program will be more apt to be positive (Manning, 1988). Taking ownership a step further is stating that any plan or

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program within the school or school district is going to be more readily accepted and supported if owned by a combination of teachers, administrators, students, and community.

Observation and evaluation is the most important part of a principal's job. To get teachers motivated to teach the students - to "stretch" the teachers to the utmost of their ability - is a prime function of the instructional leader. Evaluation is never a "surprise". It is noticing the "good" things that teachers do - not always the "bad" (R. H. Decker, class discussion, July 21, 1992). We are concerned with building relationships in an atmosphere of trust where our main goal is to see that students get the best education from the best teachers.

### Community Partnership

An administrator is involved in the community and invites the community to be involved with the school. As we are sending students into the world and, more importantly, into the future, we need to be aware of how they function and succeed there. Changes in the school, school district, and community can be implemented and

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carried through when we understand the out-of-school environments of further schooling, jobs, family, and community in general.

As a leader in the community, the administrator should be concerned with technological education for citizenship. "Computer literacy" will be part of knowing how to read, write, compute, and communicate. That does not mean more than a simple understanding of the architecture and electronics of microprocessing. It does mean understanding what computers, linked to telecommunications, can do for us - just as most of us understand an automobile's functions without being able to repair it. It is important for the members of the community to understand computers and not just the "how" but the "why". The computer and its hookup to a worldwide network of electronic communications now make it possible for individuals and small groups to analyze complex natural systems such as economic markets, voting behavior, weather, crisis management, and conflict resolution. Tools such as these empower communities who learn to use them to make complex judgments of alternative futures. Systems-thinking has created new

ways to help encompass some approximation of "the situation as a whole", as it relates to the problem being studied. Who would not want their community to be "technologically literate"? (Cleveland, 1985).

The percentage of adults with no children at home seems to be increasing. In 1974, 55% of adults had no children at home. In 1986, 68% of adults had no children at home ("Restoring", 1986). These members of the community need to be involved in education or at least be made aware of present aspects of education. The community should be involved in sensitive issues such as sex education or Aids education as well as necessary issues of heat, lights, and other bills that are affected by inflation. Budget cuts can affect public relations. If the community understands the reasoning and problems behind budget cuts, they may be willing to help out in the reduction-of-staff areas such as in the area of classroom assistants, playground assistance, or office help (Nelson, 1986).

School and community involvement with each other begins on a small scale. It should begin as the school going out into the community. Students should

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participate in the community through school-community projects. In this type of involvement, the students learn valuable life skills, such as: responsibility and timeliness (each week student litter is cleared from a business parking lot); patience and tolerance of the aged and youth (students as volunteers in nursing homes and pre-schools); and organization (balancing school, home, and community work so that each receives due importance). Through such experience young people practice community skills, develop leadership abilities, and learn planning and implementation of procedures. The community can introduce the students to "real world" experiences which provide them with the opportunity to develop a solid understanding of the community (Griffith, 1985). After a period of time, the community will have arrived at an acceptance of the school and balance will have occurred.

Community access to school is important. Buildings need to be made available in the evenings, on the weekends, and during the summer months. If outside organizations are welcomed into the schools; if the services are made available to a variety of groups; and

if during these times, all staff, personnel, and students are friendly and welcoming, the community will foster support for public education.

The schools: administrators, teachers, students, and the community, need to make an effort to publicize events and news. The media will not visit to ask about news. We need to create good news and send it out into the community. People need to read a newspaper article, witness a news item on television, or leave a school building thinking that some one there cares about the students and the school (T. Devine, class discussion, June, 1986). How the public perceives a school is important. If a school has a good program, it should advertise and market the program. The principal of the building is the key to what goes on as far as community-school relations. If he/she is industrious in every way and can locate the best workers in all areas he/she is a "full-service principal" (V. Bennett, class discussion, June 1986).

Parent advisory councils and community advisory councils are important in the relationship of the public and education. The councils are able to set goals for

the school and community which will result in objectives being met. Changes and needs in both school and community settings can be effectively met with good school-parent-community advisory committees. If schools really want to communicate more effectively with parents, they have only to develop more fully the traditional modes of home/school/community that rely on direct personal contact between educators and parents (Cattermole and Robenson, 1985).

#### Managing Personal Change

Earlier in this discussion, I alluded to leaders of the future who will learn on-the-job and be self-designed individuals. I have witnessed changes in myself within the last year, through actions in various duties at school. My practicum consisted of spring scheduling for fall courses, observance of procedures in special education meetings, and leadership and budgetary duties for the Junior-Senior Prom and Pep Club.

Spring scheduling consisted of much preliminary work. Teacher contact was initially important, so as to view all rooms, their constraints, and feasible number of students. Teacher input into scheduling within a



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department was a priority. Desire to teach certain courses at certain times in certain rooms was paramount with the department leaders in listening to their faculty. Course selection by the students was also of great importance. The registration and course guide was updated and distributed. After course selections had been made and corrected the scheduling began, giving priorities to courses which are only offered once, twice, or three times daily. After balancing the sections to accommodate grade and gender, the information was fed into the computer. The computer provided a conflict matrix between courses. With this matrix we were able to individually alter schedules so as to provide each student with his/her first choices. While working closely with this administrator, I was able to focus on the skills of time-management, organization, patience, listening (to teacher and students), and problem-solving.

My observance of procedures in special education was a minor, but an imperative part of the practicum. Scheduling of the special education courses, meeting with the teachers, and introduction to their rooms was

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eye-opening. Sitting in on their individual scheduling sessions was a learning experience. Observing and listening to problems, situations, and experiences during the weekly staff meeting was an invaluable source of information for me. Within this part of my practicum, I learned the value of procedure, individual needs, legal issues, and working with parents.

Leadership of students in an extra-curricular activity and budgetary items were learned on-the-job while involved with Prom and Pep Club. Prom involved me in fund-raising, budget allocations for decorations, entertainment, printing of tickets and invitations, and advertising/media demands. Skills needed or developed at this time were techniques for motivation (of students), organization, and community work with printers, advertising media, and rented facilities. Pep Club also involved me in fund-raising and budget, but a large part of this position was cooperation with and listening to coaches of athletic teams and team members. My job in Pep Club was to support the members and to raise school spirit. The skills I needed for this area of work was, again, motivational techniques (for the

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students), organization, and most importantly, enthusiasm for the job.

My practicum did not allow for work in student discipline. Knowing this, I asked my principal if there was an area in which I could work that would involve me with student discipline. I am currently working with students who have not served their tardy or referral detention. This has been an invaluable experience. I entered this assignment thinking that my responses and conversations with the students would be standard for all. Soon, it was obvious that each detention, student, and circumstances were distinct from the rest. Illness, after-school jobs, bus schedules, and many other deterrents make it impossible for me to look at each case as similar to the next. I have also had much contact with parents since this position began and realize that their feelings and schedules have to be considered. The big picture of discipline is listening, caring, firmness, and consistency.

Knowledge of the budgeting process was not clear until the Seminar (Administrative Applications in Field Setting) Course. Assuming the role of a leader involved

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in the district budget and the school budget is only possible with certain procedural guidelines to follow. The key objectives for use in this unit and simulation were understanding the relationships between the district budget and the school budget, learning procedures for gaining staff involvement in the development of school budget priorities, understanding procedures for requisitioning and purchasing items, learning the guidelines for managing the school budget and absorbing procedural guidelines which respond to local policies and state requirements for the management of school activity funds, such as: use and safeguarding of cash receipts, handling cash-disbursements, bank statements, managing revenue-raising activities, maintenance of records and dealing with discrepancies. During the shared decision-making simulation we discussed: receiving input from staff, parents, and the community; matching expenditures with beliefs, values, and goals identified through the planning process; applying conflict resolution strategies; developing consensus on expenditure of limited funds; and preparing

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a school budget proposal for the district office (Else, class discussion, July 8, 1993).

Working with budgeting during my practicum and during class-simulation has also brought about the discovery of budget development and the many aspects that affect it. Class size, how many days during the year the school district will operate, what the average size of schools will be, how many school buildings will operate, if the district will open new schools or close old ones, and will district revenues be secured from state, local, and federal sources are important aspects to consider. These decisions are all part of the complex process of budgeting (Guthrie and Reed, 1991).

Employing quality teachers seemed much easier to me before our simulation in the Seminar course. My understanding of pre-hiring planning and time lines were not thorough until this session. The following principles/objectives were discussed and put into practice: understanding Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity criteria; working with a search committee to develop criteria/qualities sought in candidates; developing job descriptions; preparing job

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vacancy notices and advertisement of position openings; recruiting practices; procedures for screening credentials and checking references; techniques and practice with telephone and personal interviewing; developing questions for candidates; and interview follow-up procedures, including licensure verification, contracting, and writing letters of employment and rejection for employment (Else, class discussion, July 22, 1993).

I will carry two very valuable enlightenments with me after this simulation. First, one must think carefully while screening the candidate's written recommendations. A candidate who appears quite strong "on paper" may be less impressive in person. Likewise, a candidate who appears average in written recommendations may be exactly what your school/district is looking for. If one realizes this during the interview, he/she feels fortunate that this person was asked to interview. Secondly, being at ease with applicants during an interview session is very important in becoming acquainted with the candidate.

Legal Issues and the Administrator

The law of the school includes all those areas of jurisprudence that bear on the operation of public elementary and secondary schools in the United States. School law covers a wide range of legal subject matter including contracts, property, torts, constitutional law and other areas of law that directly affect the educational and administrative processes of the educational system (Alexander and Alexander, 1980).

Law, being encompassed in the duties of the local school board, or at the state and federal levels should not be part of a principal's assumption. He/she is endowed with the responsibility of law and how it effects the school (McCumsey, class discussion, August 23, 1993).

Legal implications are all-encompassing in many areas. An administrator must be familiar with church and state legalities when allowing community groups the use of the school or when he/she is studying the curriculum. Federal or state laws on attendance and attendance boundaries must be considered. In certain areas of the country desegregation standards must be in

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compliance from year to year according to state and federal law. Population shifts must be accounted for in desegregation laws. Knowledge of teacher rights, student rights, and due process for both parties are necessary in a principal's role. Special education is an area of the educational system that has very rigid policies. An administrator's role in this area lies heavy with responsibility and interest.

All of these aspects of school law are necessary in the education/training of the administrator. His/her job does not stop with training in and learning of the law. Updates in federal, state, and local policies are ongoing responsibilities of any principal.

### In Conclusion

In anticipation of performance in an administrative role, I see myself in a leadership position with a multitude of traits that are in use constantly: observation, listening, researching, organization, delegating, assisting, compassion, discipline, awareness, sensitivity, insight, teaching, learning, and decision-making. Attempting to secure these traits is not the way to approach this position. These traits



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have to be the administrator. I cannot arrive at school and remind myself to work on decision-making, compassion or organization that day. These characteristics have to be molded within me - the way in which I go about life on a day-to-day basis.

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