

Key Assessment Paper

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As the role of principal in a middle school environment of 600 students in grades 6-8, the biggest importance is the leadership I will provide in developing the school into a dynamic learning community of which the district can be proud. Within this application letter, I will be addressing my belief and dispositions about how as a principal I will lead my constituents; students, staff, parents and community. I will also be providing examples of my views on the following concepts that will amplify my leadership beliefs: systems theory and change, school improvement, professional development, decision-making and communication.

System Theories and Change

As a current teacher, certified school counselor, and aspiring school principal, I have been consistent with the theories I abide by in my educational career. The two theories I use in my career are the solution-focused theory and the reality theory. The solution-focused theory does not focus on the past, but instead, focuses on the present and future. The principal uses respectful curiosity to invite their constituents to envision their preferred future. Then the principal and constituent start attending to moving in that direction, whether these are small increments or larger changes. To support this, questions are asked about the constituent's teaching strategies, strengths and resources. The reality theory emphasizes choices that people can make to change or improve their teaching. This theory also focuses on two general concepts: the environment necessary for conducting a positive environment and the procedures leading to change. The reality theory is flexible, friendly, and firm with its approach. It involves a lot of action-oriented events and it emphasizes the fulfillment of psychological needs of teachers, the resolution of personal difficulties, and the prevention of future problems.¹ I believe the combination of these two theories as my foundations for leadership are important when trying to

¹ Gladding, *Counseling Theories: Essential Concepts and Applications*

not only create an open relationship with my staff, but to create an effectively working school building.

School Improvement Plan

The purpose of the school improvement plan is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school, so that greater numbers of students achieve proficiency in the core academic subjects of reading and mathematics. The school improvement plan provides a framework for analyzing problems, identifying underlying causes, and addressing instructional issues in a school that has not made sufficient progress in student achievement.² My ideal vision for implementing the school improvement plan would be to assemble a school improvement planning team consisting of teachers from various grade levels, parents, and community members to share ideas with and really get a feel for what the building needs. I can only see the building through my single lens, but getting the opinions and thoughts from people all over the building will create the most comprehensive plan. Surveying the students will also help to focus the scope on what the school needs are. It is not just my responsibility to improve the school; however, it is my responsibility to communicate this information once it's pinpointed with the staff and the Illinois State Board of Education.

Professional Development

According to the No Child Left Behind Act, professional development is defined as, "A way to improve and increase teacher's knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach, and enable teachers to become highly qualified; are an integral part of broad school-wide and district-wide educational improvement plans; give teachers, principals, and administrators the knowledge and skills to provide students with the opportunity to meet challenging State

² Duke, Carr & Sterrett, *The School Improvement Planning Handbook: Getting Focused for Turnaround and Transition*

academic content standards and student academic achievement standards; improve classroom management skills'; are high quality, sustained, intensive and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom; are not 1 day or short term workshops or conferences; and support the recruiting, hiring and training of highly qualified teachers, including teachers who became highly qualified through State and local alternative routes to certification.”³ Professional development in my experience has been most successful when teachers get time to actually collaborate and apply the skills they have learned in the workshop right away. The topics of professional development should be driven by the needs of the school, identified through the school improvement plan. Because the school improvement plan is formed by input from teachers, administrators, students, parents and community members, the topics should really reflect what the district is crying out for. According to the Learning Forward Organization, there are seven effective ways to implement successful professional development. These are:

1. **Learning Communities:** Groups of teachers who are committed to continuous improvement, shared responsibility, and collective goal alignment.
2. **Leadership:** Skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.
3. **Resources:** Prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for professional learning.
4. **Data:** Using a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and school system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.
5. **Learning Designs:** Integrating theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve intended outcomes.

³ <https://egrant.alsde.edu/accelegrants/DocumentLibrary/Documents/6463C82F-BDF7-4902-8EEA-940F47914961.pdf>

6. **Implementation:** Applying research and sustained support for implementation of professional learning to foster long-term change.
7. **Outcomes:** Aligning outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.⁴

If all of these ways are effectively implemented in a school's professional development, then it will be extremely beneficial to the well-being of the school as a whole.

Decision-Making

The Educational Theory into Practice Software says that there are five steps in the administrative decision-making process. These are to identify the leadership issue; identify principles to guide the decision making; consider alternatives with associated opportunities and constraints; and to select the best alternative for the context and create a plan that includes setting direction, developing people, and making the organization work. The last step is to evaluate the effectiveness of the decision and determine principles or criteria to add, drop, or reprioritize for the future.⁵ I believe the most important factor in making effective decisions as a principal is to be and stay consistent. If your staff sees inconsistencies within your decision-making, they will assume you are playing favorites and being unfair. An effective leader will also involve others in the decision-making process, not make the executive decisions alone.

Communication

Communication is at the heart of education. Principals communicate with teachers, teachers communicate with students, and students communicate with each other. The paths for communication are as diverse as they are numerous, yet this is also the source of many problems that arise within schools. One critical area of interest is the communications that take place

⁴ <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/02/18/seven-standards-for-effective-professional-development/>?

⁵ <http://www.etips.info/docs/L4validate.pdf>

between principals and their faculties. Since they are key players involved in the normal day-to-day operations of a school, their ability to effectively communicate cannot be overstated. People communicate by writing, listening, and using non-verbal signals to get their message across. What people don't say while speaking could be just as important as what they do say, and how our body language supports or refutes what we are saying could mean the difference between communicating and just speaking. Keeping the lines of communication open in a school setting means a two-way interaction. Principals must keep in mind that feedback may not always be positive, but it should still be accepted and acknowledged. Maintaining a positive attitude is essential in effective communications. If school leaders want open, effective communications between themselves and their faculties, they must take the initiative by setting the example they want to see. With the future only a day away, the success or failure of a school will depend on how effective an administrator can communicate with the changing world.

Principals are expected to manage all the tasks listed above as part of their job description. The leadership principals provide important development in our school, and help to change it into a dynamic learning community. The concepts of systems theory and change, school improvement, professional development, decision-making, and communication will only amplify leadership beliefs if executed successfully and consistently by the leader.