

Welcome Back
Case Study Standard 6
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ISLLC Standard 6

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.

Introduction

The success of students may be impacted by conflicting demands that may be political, social, economic, legal or cultural in nature. The administrator must evaluate proposed policies and system changes that may cause an imbalance in any of these spheres and take the necessary actions to restore equilibrium.

Narration

Gabe Kotter is the new principal at Edison Heights High School in a rural county in southern Michigan. Mr. Kotter recently returned to the state from Oregon where one of the projects he had been involved in was the school's transition from a traditional school calendar to a year round calendar.

Edison Heights has experienced an increase in student enrollment. This increase comes from two sources. The first is Prairie View Public Schools, from which a number of students have transferred. Prairie View is a nearby working class city that has experienced a loss of jobs due to the closing of several plants related to the automobile industry. The district has had to close a number of school buildings as families have either left the area looking for work or have moved their children into neighboring districts as their neighborhood schools have been closed. The second source of incoming students for Edison Heights has come from an increase in the number of migrant families who work in the local farming communities. The rural county that houses Edison Heights is seen by these families as attractive for many reasons including the location and the recent economic boom connected to the flight from Prairie View.

Increased enrollment has caused a strain on existing facilities and heightened awareness with regards to effective student learning, especially for students with special learning needs. Whereas Prairie View Public Schools closed school buildings; Edison Heights is struggling with issues connected to overcrowding. Always keen to help all students learn, as enrollment continues to increase and class sizes continue to grow, Edison Heights struggles now to service its many learners, including growing numbers of ESL students, at-risk students, gifted and talented students, and students with both physical and learning disabilities.

The community has rejected the Board of Education's attempt to deal with the issue of space through the construction of new classrooms by repeatedly rejecting all millage proposal increases. Now the Board is looking to the administration for financially feasible solutions to these issues.

Prior to Mr. Kotter's arrival, a school improvement team was put together. After analysis, they felt that if the school calendar was changed to a year round multi-track calendar their space and student learning needs would be addressed. They believe that a year round calendar will help to relieve the strain on facilities and will help special needs students. Continued instruction is seen as beneficial for all learners, as it has been connected to retention, remediation, and acceleration opportunities. They also believe that other benefits connected to this solution include alternative ways of viewing faculty and staff employment opportunities, flexible scheduling for high school students interested in early graduation and/or employment opportunities, reduction of faculty and student stress, and increased attendance. At this time, they have not completed their work and thus have not finalized their proposal.

Recently the work on the proposal for a year round calendar became public in the Edison Heights community and there have been a lot of calls to Mr. Kotter (as the new head of the school improvement team) expressing outrage over the proposed change and concerns that the improvement team does not accurately reflect the community population. Mr. Kotter has come to recognize that the majority of the members on the team represent only a small segment of the community that is now Edison Heights. They are mostly former Prairie View parents who are not only new to the district but are typically better off financially than the rural families and the new migrant families that make up most of Edison Heights. Because of this, Mr. Kotter realizes that the decision of this team may not be reflective of the whole community. Many of the farming and migrant families favor traditional school calendars because they depend on their children for extra help during the summer season when the work level is high. A traditional calendar also appeals to community members, including faculty and staff, who enjoy long summer holidays spent with family and friends. Some in the community worry about what impact multi-track schedules will have on summer employment and church and community activities. Some worry about the disruption such a change might have on general family life. Mr. Kotter himself knows from past experience that other concerns with a year round calendar connect to scheduling, transitioning, and finances. Currently there is a call for Mr. Kotter to address all of these issues in a proposal for the Superintendent and the Board of Education.

Summary

Edison Heights School District's student population has grown in recent years, due to the transfer of students from a neighboring school district and an increase in the migrant population. Increased enrollment leaves the school with two issues to contend with; first, overcrowding and second, student learning. A third issue facing the district is that while the district's school improvement team has developed a recommendation, there is concern over whether or not the team is reflective of the community of Edison Heights. Mr. Kotter's fate as an administrator may rest on how he facilitates this critical process of aligning the district's issues, the school improvement teams recommendation and the community's concern about fair representation in the decision making process. He knows that the best decision supports the needs of the students, the staff and the community.

Options:

- Ensure that the school improvement team considers not only their current ideas regarding calendar changes but that they also are aware of the many other related issues, such as financing, grade retention, remediation, acceleration, transitioning, multi-track options (including “traditional” option), and online learning possibilities.
- Involve the district’s business manager to be sure that the accepted view that multi track scheduling would be cheaper than new construction is correct and consider inviting the business manager to report to the school improvement team. The findings should also incorporate any start up fees that might be incurred.
- Discuss impact of year round education with local and state departments with regards student records, testing, personnel, procedures, facilities and other areas that might be affected by the calendar change.
- Expand the membership of the school improvement team to include previously underrepresented populations within the district and finish the work that this team began.
- Expand the membership of the school improvement team to include previously underrepresented populations within the district and have the team start over to reevaluate all options not just year round education.
- Contact administrators from around the state to see who is offering year round education. Seek to develop a consortium that networks via email to discuss issues surrounding year round education. Share information with school improvement team in order to develop next steps.
- Hold a town hall meeting, advertised in the local newspaper, highlighting a parent panel recruited from a school district that offers a year round calendar. Mr. Kotter should moderate as they each offer their insight from their experience and answer questions. A Spanish interpreter should be present. Mr. Kotter should personally invite representatives from local churches and business groups to attend.
- Form separate improvement teams, which are representative of the community as it is currently made up, that, will develop options with regards to the issues improving student learning and space needs based on increasing student enrollment. Final recommendation made (both in English and Spanish) based on review of recommendations from these two teams and the school improvement team.

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- The role of public education in developing and renewing a democratic society and an economically productive nation
- The law as related to education and schooling
- The political, social, cultural and economic systems and processes that impact schools
- Models and strategies of change and conflict resolution as applied to the larger political, social, cultural and economic contexts of schooling
- Global issues and forces affecting teaching and learning
- The dynamics of policy development and advocacy under our democratic political system
- The importance of diversity and equity in our society

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- Education as a key to opportunity and social mobility
- Recognizing a variety of ideas, values and cultures
- Importance of a continuing dialogue with other decision makers affecting education
- Actively participating in the political and policy making context in the service of education

The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that:

- The environment in which schools operate is influenced on behalf of students and their families
- Communication occurs among the school community concerning trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which schools operate
- There is ongoing dialogue with representatives of diverse community groups
- The school community works within the framework of policies, laws, and regulations enacted by local, state, and federal authorities

- Public policy is shaped to provide quality education for students
- Lines of communication are developed with decision makers outside the school community

Reference

Cyber Smart Curriculum website

(http://www.cybersmartcurriculum.org/downloads/htm/SEDL-Insights__Year-Round_Education.htm)