

Standard 1: Foundation for Leadership

*Reflective Essay*

Educational and professional experiences in each of the standards are important in the development of a well-rounded administrator. The core of successful application of any of the standards in practice is the foundation for leadership. Principals must have an understanding of their own beliefs about how best to approach building a school environment that supports teacher and student success. These beliefs should have some degree of transparency in their interactions with staff. Furthermore, they must have the understanding and ability to inspire this in others.

While I am not a building administrator, I am experienced in leading at a smaller group and department level. My internship observations impressed upon me that leading at the building level is a series of small group and/or individual level interactions that work together. When this interpersonal level leadership is effective, then leading the larger group runs more smoothly. Intentionally focusing on using my leadership philosophy as guiding principles keeps me sharp. I am wary of a complacency or comfort that comes with experience, dulling my attention to these issues. One big part of maintaining active leadership is having someone with whom to reflect and discuss issues.

I've concluded that leading a group of teachers, students, and parents involves a complex balance of relationship, knowledge, accountability, and sacrifice (rolling up your sleeves and doing what needs to be done – period). Relationships are a central component to my approach as an educational leader. It is a core concept in my leadership philosophy and it is evident in my professional practice. Relationship quality can make or break the environment in a teacher-student relationship, in a classroom, and in a building (Pianta, 1999). I have always tried to be aware of how I connect with other people and how this impacts our working relationship. I try to

know how to approach people, how to communicate with them, how to listen. These efforts make a difference when we have to handle difficult or stressful situations. I use a similar style with my students. Over the years I have noted that when my students believe that I know them, care about them, and expect excellence from them, they accomplish amazing things.

Leadership requires more than supportive relationships. The responsibility of knowledge, accountability, and sacrifice also define the role of an educational leader. Current knowledge about curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment are critical to staying on the forefront of the seemingly constant change in education. Accountability and sacrifice are also core features of a good foundation for leadership. Admittedly, school leaders are under enormous pressure to be accountable to their clients – the parents and students.

Their accountability involves so much more. Pagano's *The Transparency Edge* proposes one model of management that applies to educational settings. Nine behaviors help you explore and develop yourself as a leader. I have concluded that the strength and influence of the relationships that school leaders have with others depends on their credibility and accountability to teachers in small things. Did you follow up on a discipline issue? Did you call a parent? Did you give teachers professional latitude regarding some curriculum issue? Do you pitch in and help with student supervision, with classroom projects? The artifacts and professional experiences I'll discuss in the next section manifest these views.

### *Related Artifacts*

I have worked very deliberately on participating in and initiating professional activities that help me develop relationship, knowledge, accountability, and sacrifice. This section will review several ongoing professional relationships as well as products that I believe display my

growth as a leader. The background or context of each activity or product is described followed by its application to the performance standard.

*LITE – Leadership in Technology Education*

This ongoing program focuses on state-level leadership for Career and Technology Education (CTE) teachers and administrators. My continued participation with this group has helped me stay current with issues related to vocational education at a broad level. Interactions with other teachers and leaders challenge me to reflect on my own practices. It clearly links to Standard One in that the group develops and applies knowledge through the review of federal regulations related to vocational education, it incorporates diversity training into the development and implementation of curriculum, and it is a forum for teachers and leaders to examine their professional practice and to modify it in order to enhance student learning.

*CSC – Collaborative School-making Committee*

These school-based quality management groups can be notoriously challenging to the best of school leaders. Effective leadership is critical to the impact and significance of the decisions made by these building-based groups. Knowledge, experience, accountability, and relationship quality can make or break how decisions are implemented around the building. Mandates related to staffing, scheduling, school norms and commitments, testing, teacher practice can be communicated by a leader. However, as Standard One describes, the responsibility and ethics with which a decision is implemented has a direct impact on the school environment and on student learning. My role in this group is primarily that of a participant. However, leadership takes many forms. I have found that my professional behavior and relationships with school staff have put me in the position of leader in numerous situations. I have learned from watching leaders and acting as a leader that maintaining a positive school environment that is focused on

student learning can be delicate work. I routinely reflect on the outcome of CSC meetings – sometimes positive, sometimes frustrating. Actively using knowledge, relationship, accountability, and sacrifice as a guide helps this process.

#### *PSC – Personnel Subcommittee*

This building-based group is comprised of teachers, administrators, and parents for the purpose of interviewing and hiring new staff. The work of this group is often a realistic indicator of the health of the leadership in a building. I have participated in this group as a committee member as well as the committee leader. Recruiting staff to help with interviews is sometimes difficult. It takes their time and it requires attitudes committed to quality for the benefit of the school. I have endeavored to make this process streamlined, professional, and positive. As I reflect on the actual time that interviews take, the behavior and attitudes of the group, and our goal of hiring new staff, I believe that my approach has been noteworthy. I believe that my colleagues appreciate the value I place on their time. We scheduled dates well in advance. This allowed the team to anticipate and plan for interviews rather than treating them as an afterthought to the day. We use brief, but probing questions that give us important information about applicants in a short amount of time. These factors have been discussed within the group, ultimately acknowledging the importance of a professional environment and learning community.

These professional activities have really helped me form a ‘big picture’ understanding of major issues related to leading in schools as well as challenging me to define my personal approach to being prepared as a leader.

#### *References*

Pagano, Barbara, & Pagano, Elizabeth (2004). *The Transparency Edge: How Credibility Can Make or Break You in Business*. McGraw-Hill: New York.

Pianta, Robert C. (1999). *Enhancing Relationships Between Children and Teachers*. American Psychological Foundation: Washington, D.C.