

The times they are a' changing

MPEA – Standard I Case Study
Superintendent

By Scott Wegner, Ed.D .and Sandra Wegner, Ed.D.
Southwest Missouri State University

There are many issues that the modern superintendent must demonstrate the ability to understand and resolve. One of the more important issues facing the superintendent today is developing, implementing and stewarding a vision of learning goals that is accepted within a school community that may be diverse racially, culturally, or ethnically. Based on recent demographic statistics, it is obvious that the cultural balance of numbers in the United States is changing rapidly. It is a sensitive issue requiring tact, tolerance and communication skills in working with diverse cultural perspectives in order to establish learning goals that represent a pluralistic society. The following scenario may well be one that you face as a school district superintendent.

The Acme School District has enjoyed a rich tradition of academic and extra-curricular success over the past 50 years. Historically the district was settled primarily by German-Dutch whose outlook on life was predicated upon those ideals often associated with Western-European culture. During the last five or six years there has been an influx of immigrant families, (primarily Hispanic) due to the plentiful factory jobs available within the community. Most of the immigrants have taken jobs at a lower rate of pay than local citizens were willing to take, creating tensions within the community. As is generally the case, the community tensions have spilled over into the school.

Immigrant children, while speaking very little or no English, have been required to take the state mandated achievement tests, without accommodation, causing significantly lower test scores and a fall from the top state rankings that the district has historically enjoyed. Additionally, the increase in school numbers has resulted in a change of athletic classification which has led to less success for the athletic teams. School climate is becoming negative and sometimes violent. On more than one occasion, student conflicts have erupted over racial, cultural, and ethnic issues. District efforts to date have been futile. Efforts to remediate the student conflicts have raised either cries of harassment or favoritism. Efforts to assist minority students to meet with success have been decried as "dumbing down the curriculum". Everything that is done seems to make things worse.

The situation has escalated to the point that two members of the minority community have declared their candidacy for the local board of education on a platform of promoting ethnic and racial rights within the school system. On the other side, several influential members of the community are threatening to remove their students from school and start a private school. To say the least, the school climate is tense. As superintendent, you have called a meeting of key leadership in the school and community to address the issues and regain a positive school climate based on teaching and learning. The following persons will be in attendance:

Julio Meraz: leader of the Hispanic community. Mr. Meraz is proud of his heritage but also desirous to become part of the community. He is courteous, flexible and, while uneducated formally, astute. He will not sell his culture "down the river" but is willing to meet the demands of his adopted society. He, like all parents, wants his children to perform well and he wants an end to conflict.

Sandy Stone: A school leader with the respect of teachers, administrators and the community alike. Sandy has been at the school forever and seen good times and

bad. She harbors no bias against the minority students and only wants to return to the days of high academic reputation. She wants a plan! Something that points the way to better times. She knows that issues such as teacher training, more specialized personnel and more support programs are going to be needed so she won't listen to pipe dreams.

Dirk Dagger: Community member. Dirk is leery of the new residents and unsure of their motives. As an alumnus (Honor student and captain of the state champion basketball team), he liked the old school culture and success and is skeptical as to whether or not things can ever be the same. Not hostile, but not exactly open-armed, Dirk is a typical middle-classed, rural businessman.

Superintendent: The superintendent is your group. Take some time and develop a plan to facilitate the meeting. Your goal is to create a consensus about what a school should and can be, as well as develop a plan that will get all groups working to create/recreate the positive school culture that once existed.

First consider these questions:

1. What should be the role of the superintendent in scenarios of this type?
2. What are the barriers to resolving the issues of conflict in this situation?
3. What skills, knowledge, understandings, etc., are necessary to prevent the escalation of conflict based on diversity issue? What skills exhibited in the meeting by this superintendent/members worked best to promote mutual understanding? Consensus? Resolution?
4. What skills are necessary to establish learning as the key component in a diverse society?
5. What is the meaning of diversity for the public school? What family conditions in a diverse community will most affect the vision of learning and ultimately the learning environment of the school? What can schools do about them?
6. What social agencies might be helpful in providing assistance to a school in situations like this?

Now develop recommendations including:

- A list of cultural issues which might affect learning on the part of *the immigrant students*.
- A list of potential programs (Federal State or Local) that might provide some assistance.

A comprehensive approach to the problem including:

- How to address each of the cultural issues affecting learning stated above.
- How the community tension caused by non-school issues might be approached. How to overcome any problems that the language barrier might present to learning.
- How to identify and approach any short-term or long-term strategic planning issues.

A plan of action for the upcoming meeting including:

- A strategy for communicating a vision of high expectations to all attendees.
- A strategy for gathering perspectives concerning the existing school vision.
- A list of possible consensus building strategies that might be useful.

ISLLC Standards:

Primary standard:

Standard one: **A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.**

Secondary Standard:

Standard four: **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.**

Standard one skills, dispositions and performances:

Skills:

- learning goals in a pluralistic society
- the principles of developing and implementing strategic plans
- information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies
- effective communication
- effective consensus-building and negotiation skills

Dispositions:

- School vision of high standards
- Continuous school improvement
- Inclusion of all members of the school community

Performances:

- the vision and mission of the school are effectively communicated to staff, parents, students, and community members
- the vision is developed with and among stakeholders
- the school community is involved in school improvement efforts
- the vision shapes the educational programs, plans, and actions

- relevant demographic data pertaining to students and their families are used in developing the school mission and goals.
- barriers to achieving the vision are identified, clarified, and addressed
- needed resources are sought and obtained to support the implementation of the school mission and goals
- existing resources are used in support of the school vision and goals

Critical Needs Areas Addressed:

- #3 Ensuring all students, especially at-risk, children with special needs and gifted students are successful in school.
- #4 Increasing parental involvement in the education of their children.

Notes to Instructor:

1. This case study is one that can be used to determine students' entry level skills in analysis, communications, planning and vision development/stewardship. Students need to pay close attention to the directions and the questions for consideration. You may not use all of the scoring rubric depending on the skills that you are trying to reinforce.
2. The activity could take as little as 60 minutes if you desire to see only a skeleton plan and analysis or as much as three hours if you have them apply a particular planning model or desire to see specific plans or in-depth analysis.
3. After the assignment, you may wish to have the students role-play the meeting and then analyze the interaction to see what skills were used and what tactics might have been desirable to use to reach a successful conclusion to the meeting.

Extended learnings:

1. Have the students research a community with diverse populations to ascertain the barriers to school goals that are present. Interview administrators, community members and students to get their perspectives.
2. Use the scenario as the backdrop for teaching strategic planning or communication skills. Have the students practice skills taught in the classroom through the "lens" of the scenario.

URIs:

1. The George Lucas Foundation – Changing information but a source of numerous articles on parent participation, school reform and school improvement. <http://www.glef.org/>
2. Successlink – Includes a "best practices" section which addresses conflict resolution, school character development and other programs that might assist in this case. <http://www.successlink.org/>
3. The Rural School and Community Trust – A non-profit that offers articles and suggestions on community building and numerous other related topics. <http://ruraledu.org/>
4. Pathways to School Improvement – Sponsored by NCREL, Pathways offers articles on critical issues concerning school improvement. Topics include Family-Community, Leadership, and At-risk Students. <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/>
5. The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (NCCSR) - NCCSR is the central gateway to good information on comprehensive school

reform. NCCSR collects and disseminates information that builds the capacity of schools to raise the academic achievement of all students.
<http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu>

Topics that students should be able to use or address:

- Services provided to schools by related agencies
- Professional Development Models
- ESL Programs
- Ethical Frameworks
- Professionalism and Staff Relations
- Change Processes
- Community Relations
- Motivation
- Diversity
- Instructional Climate
- Creating Shared Vision
- Consensus Building
- Communications Skills

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:	Level One	Level Two	Level Three
learning goals in a pluralistic society	Fails to recognize that learning goals must have universal appeal and meaning	Recognizes issues relate to pluralistic goals but offers no plan to review or revise	Details issues related to pluralistic goals and offers plans which include review and possible revision of existing
the principles of developing and implementing strategic plans	Does not address recognized strategic planning models	Selects a plan that addresses strategic planning	Selects a plan that addresses strategic planning which emphasizes community involvement and specific inclusion of diverse groups
information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies	Mentions no specific data collection or analysis methods	Mentions data collection and analysis methods but only in general terms	Data collection and analysis is detailed and specific as to types of data needed and for what purpose
effective communication	Plans do not incorporate effective communication strategies	Mentions communication strategies	Communication strategies are adapted to meet the individual difference of meeting participants
effective consensus-building and negotiation skills	Plans do not incorporate effective consensus-building skills	Plans for consensus building are present but do not address specific diversity issues.	Plans for consensus building are present and address specific diversity issues.
Appropriate dispositions	Fails to communicate vision of high standards or plans do not address school	Communicate vision of high standards but plans for school improvement	Communicates vision of high standards and plans for school improvement

	improvement including all members of the school community	are fail to include all members or are top-down in nature	include all members of the school community
Vision communication and development	A vision of high expectations is not clearly stated and plans for revision do not include specific plans for appropriate community involvement	A vision of high expectations is clearly stated but plans for revision do not include all members or are top-down in nature	A vision of high expectations is clearly stated and plans for revision include specific and appropriate plans for inclusion of all members.
relevant demographic data pertaining to students and their families are used in developing the school mission and goals.	Mentions no specific demographic data collection effort	Mentions demographic data collection and analysis but only in general terms	Collection and analysis demographic data is detailed and specific as to types of data needed and for what purpose
barriers to achieving the vision are identified, clarified, and addressed	Student does not inaccurately identify major issues in the scenario	Students identify several issues but do not fully develop the impact they have on learning	Students identify several issues but do not fully develop the impact they have on learning
Resources	Students are unable to identify resources available to assist in this scenario	Students identify available resources but only form one source (state federal or local)	Students identify a multitude of potential resources form multiple sources (state federal or local)

Field Test Results:

<p>“The times they are a’ changing” Class</p>				
Question	Very Helpful	Helpful	Somewhat	Not Helpful

			helpful	
1	10	6	0	0
2	14	2	0	0
3	10	6	0	0
	Highly effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not effective
4	10	6	0	0
5	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical way of implementing the standards. I learn best this way. Good activity. • Teaches that administrator is responsibility for all students. • Reflects cultural change the action planning. 			
6	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to mention ELS • I'd like more information. • Needs no improvement. • No. This seems pretty good to me. • None, Awesome case study, • This is good. We are going through this in our district right now. • Testing accommodations. 			

<p>"The times they are a' changing" Instructor</p>				
Question	Very Helpful	Helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not Helpful
1	1			
2	1			
3	1			
	Highly effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not effective
4	1			
5	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interesting scenario, one that has a great deal of applicability in this area as we have a steady influx of Hispanic students due to the jobs available. All of the ISLLC goals stated are relevant to the situation but I used it primarily to teach maintaining vision in a diverse community, communications strategies and planning. 			
6	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students wanted more information but I wouldn't suggest giving too much more since those students were looking for the answer in the problem. Hard to get them to understand that the answer is not always a matter of reading a passage and "knowing". Sometimes you have to conjure up the answer your self. There are a lot of potential correct answers. I'd recommend adding if the state allowed accommodation in test taking or not, that way you 			

	eliminate some needless discussion in an area that is not necessarily a critical issue to the problem solution. Most students thought the activity was fine as written. All seemed to enjoy it.
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Author Notes:

I took the comments and made some minor changes to the scenario; most notably I added a “no accommodation” phrase to the testing statement in the beginning. The students and instructor also offered some clerical suggestions which I made. The bulk of the students and the instructor said leave it as is so I pretty much did.

I changed the instructor’s instructions to include a reference concerning the use of the scoring guide. The instructor doesn’t have to use all of the criteria, just the ones that he/she is trying to teach to or reinforce.