

## ***“Leverage”***

*MPEA – Standard V Case Study  
Superintendent*

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As a superintendent in a school district bent on making some innovative changes you have continually “bumped heads” with Mary, president of the local teacher group. Mary is a good teacher and a well- respected leader both in the school and the community. The biggest problem has been that Mary is extremely traditional in her approach to education and is insistent that all or any change go through the local teacher association for approval/support. You have cooperated with this process for the past year and no change has been denied or even disputed by the teacher group, but it has made the process of change seem like a long stay in the dentist chair. You are behind in the timelines for the implementation of board mandated changes and Mary, and her insistence on association approval is the principal reason. Even the teachers tire of having every little detail put to a vote of confidence. The board is restless and has intimated that your job depends on getting the changes done on time.

While talking to some fellow superintendents about your dilemma at a state leadership conference, a superintendent from another part of the state calls you aside. It seems that he knows Mary too. The superintendent relates to you that before Mary moved to your district, she was in his, in a neighboring state. The superintendent states that Mary was quite hellion in her youth, prideful and assertive and would take on any challenge. You tell him that you have little problem believing that since you don't think she has changed much. You both have a chuckle over the comment.

The superintendent says, however, that he might know something that you would have problems believing. You are intrigued and ask him to explain. The story is as follows.

“Mary was quite a looker in those days and she attracted a lot attention, if you know what I mean. And she was anything but a teetotaler. Not a drunk, but she would be what you might call a very “sociable drinker”. One time, at a meeting in New Orleans, Mary and a couple of teachers from a neighboring district went down to Bourbon Street for a night out. They had a few drinks and, after the stimulation of Bourbon Street had dulled her senses a bit, they went to a well known bar for another round. Well, long story short, after a few drinks and some admiring looks and comments from the men in the crowd, Mary was challenged to dance on the table and “take it off”. Not one to lose a bet, Mary obliged. Mary ultimately took her “topless” act into the street and garnered the attention of an undercover policeman. Quite a show as I recall, one of the guys even had a camera and took some photos. One of which I still have.

Mary was arrested on misdemeanor charges, fined and let go. It was all pretty much hushed up and no one in the district ever knew, but I have to tell you, Mary was not much of a problem for me any more once she knew that I knew. She'd do anything to keep a lid on the story.

Life was a dream after that. The other teachers were easy to work with. I never railroaded anything. Never had to. Keeping Mary out of

the picture just made things run smoother. Now, how would you like a copy of that photo?"

What should you do?

First consider these questions:

1. Should you use the picture or even just the story to help speed up needed change?
2. If the children's future is at stake, are you justified in removing Mary as an obstacle?
3. If your future is at stake, are you justified in removing Mary as an obstacle?
4. What do you say to the superintendent that shared the story?
5. What is your legal responsibility? Your ethical responsibility?
6. Does Mary's action of two decades ago create a moral issue? What if it were two weeks ago?
7. What do you say to Mary?
8. What your job was on the line over the needed changes in the district?
9. Who can you go trust to discuss this matter with? Friends, family, co-workers, lawyers?
10. What if the job application (which Mary indicated in the negative) for your district states, that "you have never knowingly committed any actions that go against the community standards of morality."

Now, develop recommendations including:

- A list of legal issues which might affect situation
- A list of ethical issues that might affect the situation.
- A list of the pluses and minuses of possible actions.

A plan of action including:

- What to say to the Mary's former superintendent.
- Who could the superintendent contact to discuss the matter.
- What the superintendent should say to Mary.
- An approach to speeding up the change process in light of this matter.

ISLLC Standards:

Primary standard:

Standard five: **A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.**

Secondary Standard:

Standard two: **A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.**

Standard five skills, dispositions and performances:

Skills:

- various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics
- professional codes of ethics

Dispositions:

- bringing ethical principles to the decision-making process
- subordinating one's own interest to the good of the school community
- accepting the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions
- development of a caring school community.

Performances:

- examines personal and professional values
- demonstrates a personal and professional code of ethics
- considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others
- treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect
- protects the rights and confidentiality of students and staff

Critical Needs Areas Addressed:

- #5 Providing information, which will assist public school administrators and teachers in understanding the process of [site-based] decision making.

#### Notes to Instructor:

1. This case study is one that can be used to determine students' entry level skills in professional ethics, law or human relations. It could be used as an exit exercise to a law-ethics lesson. If so, you might want to have students apply specific legal or ethical frameworks that you have introduced.
2. Make sure the students reflect upon the superintendent's set of circumstances and, least for a while, avoid reflecting on what "they would do". This will avoid the sometimes "holier than thou" mentality people have about their own behavior.
3. After the initial product review and discussion is over, ask the students how they would have responded. If different than the superintendent, you might ask them why they feel they would be different than the superintendent. This might be a good time to discuss the impact of concepts like political pressure, occupational survival, stress and other related topics on decision-making.
4. The activity should take around 60 minutes.
5. After the assignment, you may wish to have the students role-play the discussions with the superintendent and Mary's former superintendent or the superintendent and Mary. They could then analyze their interactions to see what skills were used and what tactics might have been desirable to use to reach a successful conclusion to the conversations.

#### Extended learnings:

1. Have the students address specific human relations issues related to creating caring communities or addressing confidentiality.
2. Have the students speculate the motives of Mary's former superintendent and analyze his behavior of twenty years earlier. .

#### URLs:

1. Centre for the Study of Values and Leadership - Centre is devoted to the support, promotion and dissemination of theory and research on values and leadership. Has a good list of resources on ethics.  
<http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~pbegley/>
2. Georgia Professional Standards Commission – Provides a Code of Ethics for Educators defining e professional behavior for Georgia and serving as a guide to ethical conduct. The Professional Standards Commission has adopted standards which represent the conduct generally accepted by the education profession. <http://www.gapsc.com/Professionalpractices/NEthics.asp>
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. Success link – 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/>
5. FindLaw – A site that contains numerous links to case law at several judicial levels. <http://public.findlaw.com/>

Topics that students should be able to use or address:

- Ethical frameworks
- Professionalism and Staff Relations
- Change Processes
- Human Relations
- Motivation
- School Climate
- Communications skills

<b>The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:</b>	<b>Level One</b>	<b>Level Two</b>	<b>Level Three</b>
Ethics various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics professional codes of ethics	Sees situation only from pragmatic view – getting the job done	Recognizes ethical issues but still uses the situation to accomplish organizational goals	Recognizes ethical issues and acts in a way that preserves integrity of profession.
Displays Acceptable Dispositions bringing ethical principles to the decision-making process subordinating one's own interest to the good of the school community accepting the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions development of a caring school community.	Attitude and Beliefs manifest a "Me first" tone.	Attitude and Beliefs are slanted toward individual interests though actions may reflect ethical treatment of others	Behaviors reflect an attitude and belief that confidentiality and the dignity of others is paramount in the decision-making process, regardless of potential consequences.
examines personal and professional values	Fails to consider their own beliefs as they encounter the scenario solution	Considers their own beliefs and values as they encounter the scenario solution.	Scenario actions mirror the personal beliefs and values. There is no double standard.
demonstrates a personal and professional code of ethics	Sees situation only from pragmatic view –	Recognizes ethical issues but still uses the situation to accomplish	<i>Recognizes ethical issues and acts in a way that preserves</i>

	getting the job done	organizational goals	<i>integrity of profession.</i>
considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others	Fails to consider the impact of their actions in the scenario solution	Considers the impact of their actions in the scenario solution but does not let the impact affect their behavior.	Considers the impact of their actions in the scenario solution and alters behavior to maintain ethical considerations.
treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect	Acts in own self interest. Ignores the good of the people.	Acts to the good of the people but inserts qualifications or conditions.	Acts to the good of the people without qualifications or conditions.
protects the rights and confidentiality of students and staff	Does not consider confidentiality in the scenario solution.	Considers confidentiality but exhibits behavior that makes confidentiality as conditional.	Considers confidentiality as an absolute right of the person and predicates actions upon this belief.

Field Test Results:

"Leverage" Class				
Question	Very Helpful	Helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not Helpful
1	5	6	3	0
2	8	4	2	0
3	6	5	2	0
	Highly effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not effective
4	6	6	1	0
5	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There were no student comments in this section</li> </ul>			
6	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very Interesting dilemma</li> <li>No change required</li> <li>Looks good to me</li> <li>For me it was to obvious a choice</li> </ul>			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only one ethical thing to do</li> </ul>
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"Leverage" Instructor				
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"> <li>• The standards addressed were very for the topic covered. We were just about start a topic on ethics and this provided a good springboard for the topic. So many students see ethics in a black-white manner. There were even a few "who cares".</li> </ul>			
6	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most of the comments about the scenario were positive. Those who answered too quickly and gave the easy answers missed the gist of the project. That was to identify what the issues were and what the superintendent should do.</li> <li>• I would recommend getting away from what "I" would do and focus on recommending a plan of action for the superintendent. Some students have never experienced the type of pressure the superintendent is feeling and have a tendency to consider the task as simple. It's like asking someone if they could go to war when they have never experience the horror of war. It's too easy to be noble. Having them concentrate on the superintendent's issues will make them more analytical and probably a bit more honest.</li> </ul>			

Author Notes:

I took the comments and made some changes to the product. I made sure that the students reflected upon the superintendent's issues rather than their own morality. I then added a suggestion to the instructor to make sure that the students understood this. I also added that the instructor, upon conclusion of the exercise should then ask if the students would have acted any differently than the superintendent and why. A discussion can then ensue about why they think they are different than the superintendent. The instructor seemed to think this would make the scenario a bit less "easy" for some students.

The students and instructor also offered some clerical suggestions which I made.