

Conflict Resolution

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Standard 1: (Knowledge indicators are in Instructors Notes and Scoring Guide)

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.

Standard 3: (Knowledge indicators are in Instructors Notes and Scoring Guide)

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Scenario:

Assume you are the Superintendent of Alpha Consolidated School District. Although you have been in this position for only six (6) months, you have nurtured a supportive climate. Teachers, principals, students, and school-community participants sense that you can be trusted. One morning, during a scheduled appointment in your office, one of five (5) elementary principals volunteered the following information:

"I have tried to get Mrs. Harding to attend the school workshop series so that she can incorporate the new technology in her classroom but she always manages to develop an excuse not to come. I mean really, this is almost 2001."

"As you know," continued the principal, "she is a thirty year member of the school. I could hardly believe it," said the anxious principal. "The School Board actually gave her a gold apple for hanging around that long. Five of the seven board members were students of Mrs. Harding and they all think she is a great teacher. Recently, she had coffee downtown with the Board President, Mr. May.

"I overheard her say, in a louder than usual voice so others could hear, 'They are getting away from the basics with all that technology. Just wait until the community finds out the children are being entertained rather than being taught.' "

Assignment:

The student is to choose three of the five approaches to conflict resolution synthesized by Reginald Leon Greene in *Practicing the Art of Leadership: A Problem Based Approach to Implementing the ISLLC Standards* on pages 169-180 (or some other appropriate reference, provided by the instructor). Provide a rationale for your selection. Please refer to the scoring guide provided in advance.

Instructor's Notes and Scoring Guide

For

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Knowledge Indicators

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- Effective communication
- Effective consensus-building and negotiation skills
- Applied motivational theories
- Adult learning and professional development models
- The change process for systems, organizations, and individuals
- School cultures
- Theories and models of organization and the principles of organizational development
- Organizational procedures at the school and district level
- Human resource management and development
- Emerging issues and trends that potentially impact the school community
- The values of the diverse school community
- Model and strategies of change and conflict resolution as applied to the larger political, social, cultural, and economic context of schooling
- Global issues and forces affecting teaching and learning
- The importance of diversity and equity in a democratic society

Disposition Indicators

The administrator believes in, values and is committed to:

- Continuous school improvement
- The inclusion of all members of the school community
- A willingness to continuously examine one's own assumptions, beliefs and practices
- Professional development as an integral part of school improvement
- The benefit that diversity brings to the school community
- A safe and supportive learning environment
- Making management decisions to enhance learning and teaching
- Taking risks
- Trusting people and their judgment
- Accepting responsibility
- High-quality standards, expectations, and performances
- Involving stakeholders in management practices
- A safe environment
- Involvement of families and other stakeholders in school decision-making processes
- The proposition that diversity enriches the school
- The idea of the common good
- Bringing ethical principles to the decision-making process

Scoring Guide

3 Points

- Before acting the student must relate the manner in which he/she will diagnose the situation presented by the principal (Green, p.178-79).
- The response requires three direct citations from the reading combined with a logical, efficient, written narrative. The written narrative must describe an example of how a negative, dysfunctional conflict may be turned into a functional conflict that produces a positive change for the students in the elementary school and Mrs. Harding.

- The student must link the written narrative to a broad based, well designed plan, such as the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP), the standards developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), accreditation review, and/or others.

2 Points

- The student provides a general, non-specific manner of diagnosis.
- The response includes two direct citations that lead to functional conflict and provides a general rationale.
- The written narrative is linked to one of the standards listed above.

1 Point

The response is vague without logical implications.

Other:

- 0 - .5 may be subtracted for poor grammar, spelling and the general assemblance of the written narrative.
- Students are asked not to disclose any examples that portray actual identities. When examples are provided the privacy of anyone referenced will be protected.

Sample Response (Score = 2)

The first thing I would do as the superintendent would be to diagnose the conflict, using various resources in an attempt to gain a measure of reliability and the potential for dysfunctional conflict. (Green, p.178-79) I would apply the decision-making model that Green created to synthesize the work done by Barge 1994; Gorton, 1987; Hoy and Tarter, 1995; Yukl, 1994 (Green, p.131-33). The suggested steps: identify the problem, analyze the problem, develop alternatives, assess alternatives, select the most appropriate alternative, and evaluate the process.

Initially, an empathetic response to the principal's concern about Mrs. Harding is indicated. The principal seems to have a degree of anxiety and an empathetic response may alleviate his tension and allow him to think clearly. When the principal has relaxed, probing questions should be used to determine the nature of the conflict. This is valuable because I will be able to assess the level of the principal's dialogue.

To become immediately involved and make command decisions regarding Mrs. Harding may be counter productive. This does not mean that I would avoid seeking a positive solution. However, my direct involvement may lead to the triangulation of my position. In this case, the principal must open up a dialogue with Mrs. Harding. I may guide this dialogue by making constructive suggestions intended to find the basis for functional conflict and positive resolution.

It is important that any guided process avoids dwelling on past incidences. In this case, the past may provide undue bias toward Mrs. Harding. The principal must feel that he is being supported. However, given that the principal has worked with Mrs. Harding for three years, there is an obvious need to provide a constructive framework that will serve to guide the principal. This should be a superintendent's obligation.

After reflection, I may choose to ask the principal to utilize the MSIP process and ISLLC standards to motivate Mrs. Harding. This will mitigate a potent intrapersonal conflict between the principal and Mrs. Harding.

References:

Green, Reginald Leon, *Practicing the Art of Leadership: A Problem Based Approach to Implementing the ISLLC Standards*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 2001.