

The times they are a' changing

*MPEA –Case Study
Administration*

By Christa Boske, Assistant Professor
University of Houston Clear Lake

Exclusionary Practices

Abstract

This case study covers a wide variety of challenges facing newly hired administrators as they make an effort to create and sustain systemic change within increasingly political, social, cultural, racial, and economic settings. It may be used in an introductory course for teachers, aspiring school leaders and practitioners in the field of school leadership. This case also presents myriad complex organizational issues that may be used in a seminar for advanced doctoral students.

Case Narrative

You have recently accepted a position as an assistant principal in the Willow School District. The principal of the building privately introduced you to the unspoken culture of the building and the obstacles ahead: namely promoting the success of your minority students. The principal informs you she is the district's first Black female hire within a historically all-White school. During the civil rights movement, the school, located on the north side of the city, was the last school to integrate Black students. White residents migrated to the north side of town, seemingly in order to uphold their traditional White middle-class values. Although the city of Willow has undergone dramatic demographic changes over the past 30 years, this particular school enrolled more White students than any of the other 30 schools in the district.

You worked as an administrator in the school district prior to accepting the assistant principal position at the middle school. Several colleagues suggested you interview for this administrative position because of your previous research. Your data analysis revealed a disproportionate number of suspensions and academic failing grades for Black and Latino students. You are perceived by Black and Latino coworkers as a social change agent. You are identified as someone who is a mover and a shaker. Your White counterparts seem intimidated by you. At first, White faculty members assumed you would engage in the system's traditional discriminatory disciplinary behaviors due to your similar racial identity. You made it clear to your White colleagues that you will promote the success of all students, follow the district's disciplinary policies, and provide support for students and their families throughout their academic careers.

On your first day of work as a Willow high school administrator, you were introduced to your mentors. All three of your mentors are Black administrators with a wealth of experiences. Each mentor attended the K-12 Willow School District or immediate surrounding school districts. Several White colleagues approach you and state, "you are hanging out with the wrong people." From that moment forward, these

White colleagues do not speak to you or acknowledge your presence. When you ask your mentors why faculty members make such remarks, they reply, “Because we are nothing but n***** to them.” With this experience in mind, you spend the next year-and-a-half forming alliances with colleagues who work toward eliminating the academic and discipline disparities between Black/Latino students and White students.

The supervisor of your new position at the middle school is aware of your professional history as an administrator at the high school. She requests your commitment to help build a school environment in which Black and Latino students will succeed academically. The principal further explains that this middle school, once a predominantly White middle-class school, transitioned to a majority Black and Latino school with over 80% of children living in poverty.

The principal further describes the racial demographic changes over the past five years. Black student populations decreased from 65% to 45% and Latino student populations increased from 20% to 45%. The White student population decreased from 15% to 10% while the Pacific Islander population increased from 0% to 2%. As the White population continued to decrease, White parents became more vocal and dissatisfied with the operation of the school. These same parents made formal complaints to the Willow School Board, comprised of all-White board members, claiming their children were not receiving adequate academic services. The White parents argued that their White children were not academically successful due to the exposure of “less intellectual children with substantial needs.”

The principal continues to inform you of how your White colleagues will perceive your role within the school community. She notes that White parents and White teachers (who comprise 99% of the faculty) will perceive you as the “one who will save them from all of this.” The principal encourages you as a new administrator to restate your values and beliefs in a public venue during a faculty meeting. The principal continues, “The White faculty expects me to confront these issues as an angry Black woman. They assume that race and class issues are part of my soap box.” She is convinced that the White teachers who interviewed you and unanimously voted for you chose to value your race over your principles.

Located 60 minutes from two major metropolitan areas, Willow School District consists of two high school campuses, one alternative high school, special education schools, eight middle schools and 20 elementary schools. Each of these schools has a principal and at least one assistant principal or dean. There are approximately 15,000 students and 1,000 certified employees. The students are 5% White, 30% Black, 55% Latino, and 10% Asian. This growth in the racial and ethnic diversity of the school district represents a shift from 30% children of color to over 95% in 15 years. The high school will only graduate 45% of the original freshman class with less than 10% of the student population allowed to be enrolled in the college preparatory program.

The Willow middle school, which enrolls 650 middle school students, faces several challenges: 1) Increases in racial tension in the school between Black, Latino,

and White students; 2) Increases in the number of Black and Latino children sent down to the office for disciplinary purposes; 3) The school is on the academic watch list for the third year in a row due to not meeting Annual Yearly Progress for Black, Latino, and students living in poverty; and 4) There is a physical and social divide in the school between the White faculty (99% of the total faculty) and the support staff (90% are either Black or Latino).

The majority of parents in the Willow school community work 10-12 hours per day in blue-collar jobs. Many parents speak only Spanish at home. The majority of students live in female headed households with parents who are divorced or never married. The parent school organization has less than 2% of the members attending or representing the middle school population. Black and Latino parents share with you that they do not feel welcome by the teachers. Several parents express their desire to help the school, but language barriers, limited access to the school, and insecurities about their former education influence their decision to stay away from the school.

After being welcomed by your new colleagues as an assistant principal, you begin to collect data regarding the number of disciplinary incidents, the time of day, minutes missed by students sent out of class, number of students sitting on the floor in the hallway, subject(s) missed, number of interventions before sending down a student, and parent contacts. Once you collect the data for the first quarter, you present the information to the principal. She asks you to present the following information to the faculty during professional development (Tables 1 and 2).

You share the data with the faculty. They are offended this information is collected and shared with a large group. Teachers claim this data insinuates they are not doing their job. They inform the principal of their complaints. The teachers decide to categorize this data collection as a violation of the district's student discipline handbook. The principal reminds the teachers of the No Child Left Behind mandates. She elaborates on the impact this data will have on the students' spring test scores. Teachers continue to protest and state, "we have bad kids in this school. It never used to be this way when I went here."

The principal requests that you continue to collect this data despite the informal threats made by faculty members. Several White teachers approach you privately after the meeting and during the following months. You took the following notes and shared them with the principal (Table 3).

The principal informs you she received a phone call from the superintendent. He is concerned about the number of referrals and suspensions in the building. The principal shares the data with the superintendent. The superintendent is aware of the political issues. He continues to share with the principal that he received phone calls from White parents who feel as though their children are not receiving a quality education.

Throughout the year, teachers threaten to file or file formal complaints regarding the collection and sharing of disciplinary data to the faculty. Several formal complaints are made during teacher evaluations. These complaints focus on the use of data as a

means of illustrating student success. Tenured teachers and teachers attempting to earn tenure are surprised by the detailed evaluation summaries and data driven evaluation scores. Past evaluations were rumored to be higher due to the fear that teachers would file complaints if they were not given higher marks. Although these evaluation issues were supported by the superintendent, the data driven analysis created a divide between the support staff/administration and the majority of the White faculty members.

Colleagues who formed a coalition to eliminate the disparities within the school inform you of the newest rumors. The White teachers are angry with you because you are not who they thought you would be. You are now considered an advocate for the children, parents, and community and against the White teachers.

The principal is concerned for your well-being, but believes in the mission and commitment to uphold the moral purposes of No Child Left Behind. The principal continues to analyze relationships between the disciplinary data, comments made by the school community, student grades, and standardized test scores.

After the third quarter, you present this information to faculty members. The purpose of this presentation is to initiate preventative measures to decrease the number of student disciplinary actions. The intent of creating preventative measures is to increase the number of students remaining in the classroom. You present the data below during the faculty's school improvement plan session. The purpose of this professional development session is to understand how to utilize data to meet the needs of students living in poverty, English Language Learners, and Black/Latino students (Table 4).

You ask the faculty members to predict the results in Table 4 before presenting the information. Faculty members underestimate the number of referrals and the number of instructional hours missed due to disciplinary actions. A few teachers voice their concerns and many remain silent. Some teachers argue that the school "would be different if they didn't have to teach these kids that are unmotivated and cannot learn because they are so far behind." Teachers debate the impact of the data presented. One teacher raises the following questions, "How can students learn when they are out of class for days at a time? What can we do to keep them in class? Don't we have a responsibility to help all of the children?"

Teaching Notes

This case study covers a wide variety of complex organizational issues that can confront aspiring or practicing school leaders. One intent of this case study is to stimulate dialogue that will enhance the quality of educational leadership through a shared vision of education. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLCC) created six leadership standards designed to represent a concerted effort to create strong educational leaders who are committed to being moral and social advocates for children across the nation's schools.

This case study reflects the complicated issues aligned with the ISLCC standards. The following questions honor the social, economical, cultural, and political challenges that are central issues for school leaders:

ISLCC Standards

Standard 1

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.

- What are the core beliefs of the school?
- What is the vision and mission of the school? How would you effectively communicate the vision and mission of the school to staff, parents, students, and community members?
- How was the vision established? How was the school community involved in the school improvement efforts?
- What were the components of the implementation plan in which the objectives and strategies to achieve the vision and goals were clearly articulated?
- What assessment data related to student learning was used to develop the vision, mission, and goals?
- What relevant demographic data pertaining to students and their families were used in developing the school mission and goals?
- What are the barriers to achieving the vision are identified, clarified, and addressed?
- What are the needed resources sought to obtain support for the implementation of the school's mission and goals?
- Recommend that students visit the Harvard Civil Rights Project website (<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/>). After exploring the site, ask students to compare and contrast their findings with the case study's complex issues of gender, race, and class.
- How does this case study relate to education and inequality? How would Kozol (2005) respond to this case study?

- How do Smith's (1998) 13 knowledge bases apply to this case study? How could the Willow School District begin to incorporate these multicultural knowledge bases? How would this initiative impact the district's K-12 curriculum?
- What is your definition of a moral and social change agent? How would you respond to the situations presented in this case study?
- What battles would you choose? What battles would you choose not to fight? How do your values play a role in how you define and respond to this case study?

Standard 2

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.

- *To what extent are individuals within the Willow School District treated with fairness, dignity, and respect?*
- *How would you promote professional development that promotes a focus on student learning that is consistent with the vision, mission, and goals of the organization?*
- *What are the responsibilities and contributions of teachers, students, parents, community members, and school leaders within Willow School District?*
- *How is diversity considered in developing learning experiences for staff, faculty, and students?*
- *What is the culture of expectations for the school leaders, faculty, staff, students, and parents?*
- *How is the success of the school assessed on a regular basis?*
- *How is Willow School District organized and aligned for success?*
- *How does the curriculum design, implementation, evaluation, and refinement influence student outcomes at the Willow School District?*

Standard 3

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.

- *What are the emerging trends within the Willow school community?*
- *How are the operational procedures designed to manage and maximize opportunities for successful learning?*

- *What are the potential problems?*
- *How do the school plan, equipment, and support systems operate to provide a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*
- *How are problems within the learning community framed? How are these problems resolved?*

Standard 4

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.

- *How visible are the school leaders?*
- *What kind of relationships do school leaders have with community leaders, faculty, parents, staff, and students?*
- *What community outreach is necessary for Willow School District's success?*
- *What are community resources available to the Willow School District?*
- *To what extent is diversity recognized and valued by the school leaders, staff, faculty, students, parents, and community members?*
- *What opportunities are available to develop collaborative skills?*

Standard 5

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

- *What are the personal and professional values of the school leaders and faculty?*
- *How do the school leaders demonstrate their values, beliefs, and attitudes?*
- *How do the school leaders examine and consider how the prevailing values of the diverse school community influence the success of the school?*

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.

- *What are the political, social, cultural, and economic systems and processes influencing the Willow School District?*
- *Ask students to research surrounding school districts undergoing racial, social, economic, and/or political changes. How are learning community responding to the changes?*

- What are the global forces affecting the teaching and learning within the Willow School District?
- How do ISLCC standards support the school leader's ability to influence the social fabric of society including more racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse students and families?
- When do racial, social, and economic demographic elements influence school policy and decision-making? What do you perceive as the demographic tipping point?
- How would you as an educational leader respond to a school community undergoing increasing numbers of emerging majority members, children living in poverty, and English Language Learners?
- What are the dynamics of policy development and advocacy under Willow School District's democratic political system?
- What is the importance of diversity and equity in a democratic society? How do these elements impact the Willow School District?

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Table 1. School Student Demographics and Suspensions

Total Number of Students in the Building	650
Total Number of Black Students	292
Total Number of Latino Students	292
Total Number of White Students	53
Total Number of Asian/Pacific Islander Students	13
Total Number of Students Living in Poverty	520
Total Number of Suspensions for the First Quarter	168

Table 2. Discipline Referral Summary for the First Five Weeks

Number of Students Sent to the Office By Week	Total Number Sent to the Office	Disrespect	Disruption	Dress Code Violation	Fighting	Late to Class	Minutes Missed From Being Out of Class/Disciplinary Measures	Number of Interventions Including Parent Contacts Prior to Sending Students Down to the Office
Week 1	96	26	30	25	3	12	960	2
Week 2	112	35	33	15	20	9	6,620	5
Week 3	122	48	37	19	17	3	7,320	7
Week 4	89	37	29	11	12	0	5,340	6
Week 5	89	52	21	1	10	5	5,340	4

Table 3. Summary of Comments Made By School Community Members

<i>School Community Members</i>	<i>Comments Made Regarding Student Population and Community</i>
Comments Made by Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These Black children should go back on a ship to Africa where they belong. • I want you to come to this parent conference because I am afraid of this big Black man. • I don't know what the point of all of this is-these children will only get as far as a mobile home anyways. • The students are the problems. • They come from bad homes. • I don't need to talk with the parents because I am the teacher. • I know what is right. I don't have time to work with students. • I am very busy with teaching and I just want to go home. • I am not calling parents because I don't have time. • It's not in my job description . • I am afraid of Blacks I am afraid of these children. • All of these kids are nothing but gang bangers. • That child is nothing but a fag. • You know these students will amount to nothing. They are just bad. • I have worked here for many years and let me tell you something. This neighborhood has changed for the worse. It used to be a nice white neighborhood. It certainly got darker. • Three teachers took a personal day three years in a row during the Black History Month celebration • I resent these children. • I can't wait to get away from these needy kids. • "They" are so loud-doesn't anybody teach them manners. • Their parents are stupid anyway.
Comments Made by Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My child is not getting a good education because he is around all of these people with problems. • When is my child going to learn about white history? I am tired of my child learning about Blacks and Mexicans. • These teachers treat me like I am uneducated. • Teachers don't want me in the classroom and made it clear to me. • I do not feel welcome here. • Teachers do not treat my child as if he were their own.

Comments Made By Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How come the teachers don't like me? Is it because I'm Black? Is it because I'm Mexican? • How come we only learn about Black people in slavery? Didn't we do anything else? • You know what the real problem is? White people are being treated the way black people are supposed to be treated-that's just wrong (White student)
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Table 4. Summary of Discipline Data for Quarters 1-3

Number of Students Receiving Multiple Referrals	37
Total Number of Out of School Suspensions	526
Total Number of White Students Receiving Discipline Referrals	2
Total Number of White Students in the School	53
Total Number Referrals-Black Students	1,194
Total Number of Black Students in the School	292
Total Number of Referrals-Latino Students	650
Total Number of Latino Students in the School	292
Total Number of Referrals-Asian/Pacific Islander Students	18
Total Number of Asian/Pacific Islander Students in the School	13
Total Number of Referral for Boys	1,490
Total Number of Boys in the School	365
Total Number of Referrals for Girls	374
Total Number of Girls in the School	276
Total Number of Disciplinary Referrals	1,864
Total Number of Hours of Instruction Missed Due to Being Sent Down to the Office	1,864
Total Number of Hours of Instruction Missed Due to Receiving Out of School Suspensions	12,624
Total Number of Hours of Instruction Missed Due to Serving In-School Detentions	12,800
Total Number of Hours of Instruction Missed Due to Discipline Referrals	27,288