

The Model School Opportunity!

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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.

Performance Indicator:

The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring stakeholders are involved in decisions affecting schools.

An Opportunity

". . . We have been discussing the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's new school improvement program for the last 30 minutes, and it's pleasing to me that you had several questions and positive comments about the idea. I thought this topic would be a good one for our monthly principals' meeting, and I especially feel that it is a good opportunity for a progressive school district like Richfield's"

As Superintendent Brown continued to explain his vision for the Richfield School District, Susan Leeber, principal of Revenue Middle School, became even more enthused about how this new Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) school improvement program could help her school.

....."To conclude this planning meeting, I want to present a challenge to each of you. DESE is looking for schools to volunteer as a test-site pilot program for the school improvement project. And I would be extremely pleased if some of our schools in the Richfield School District would volunteer to be a part of this new and exciting incentive. I realize that it would be a lot of work on the part of your staff, but the potential rewards are great. Not only would your school have a school improvement program in place, but also your school would be cited as a model school for the entire state. DESE has already stated that they want to utilize the principal and several faculty members as consultants for other schools around the state who are considering the school improvement program. If you may be interested, please see me immediately after this meeting or sometime within the next week. Thank you for your attention, and I certainly hope that some of our schools take advantage of this opportunity.".....

As Superintendent Brown finished his remarks, Susan Leeber was excited as she had been in months. She had been researching school improvement programs for the past six months with the idea of improving the current improvement program at Revenue. The standardized test scores in her building were barely at the 50th percentile in the state, her school was the third highest out of four middle schools in the district, and the most recent superintendent's survey indicated low staff morale in her building. Mrs. Leeber also recalled the last PTO meeting when several parents questioned her about what she was going to do to increase academic achievement at Revenue. She needed to jump-start her school, and this program might just do that.

Susan was the first to reach Dr. Brown after the meeting. "Dr. Brown, I really appreciated what you said about the DESE program, and I want you to know that I am volunteering Revenue Middle School for the school improvement program!"

"Susan, that's great! I'm really pleased to hear that! I'm glad to see you that you believe in the value of this program and want to be a part of it."

"I really do, Dr. Brown, I think this will really help our students academically and will result in higher test scores at Revenue. Do I contact the DESE or will your office?"

"We will contact them next week. I am sure that within the next few days some of our other schools will jump on board, and we want to have all of our schools in place when we notify the state department. The information packets and guidelines for the program self-study will likely be mailed to the Richfield Central Office within the next month, and we'll get the packet to you."

"Great, I can't wait!! Thank you!"

"Thank you for volunteering, Susan!"

When Mrs. Leeber got back to her office, she immediately contacted her two assistant principals, Bob Cooper and Barb Peterson, and gathered them into her office.

"I've got great news. Revenue Middle School is going to be a test site for the State Department's new school improvement program!! We're going to be one of the first schools in the state to participate, and I think it will be wonderful for our students and our school! It's going to take a lot of work, but it will be worth it."

At first there was a strange silence, then Bob spoke up, "You said a lot of work. What exactly are you talking about?"

"Well, it's similar to the North Central accreditation review which we just finished last spring. We will have to conduct another self-study, but I'm sure we can use some of the North Central data, and then a committee will come and visit us again."

"Another self-study? And another visit? Susan, are you sure you want to do this?" replied Barb.

"Well, yes, I am. Do you think we shouldn't?"

Barb didn't reply for a moment.

"Susan, do you remember eight months ago when the North Central visiting team left our building. The entire faculty just collapsed. We had been dealing with that for almost a year and everybody had had it up to here!" moving her hand above her head.

"When you mentioned that the North Central would not be back for five years, some teachers openly stated that five years was too soon for them."

Susan was momentarily silent,"Bob, what do you think?"

"I think there might be a riot." Quiet chuckle, "I don't want to be in the meeting when you tell them. Besides, you know they are just now getting used to the idea of shared ownership in decisions, which you started last year."

Barb was quick to concur, "I don't want to be in that meeting either!"

"Well, O.K., let me think about it, and we'll talk about it tomorrow."

After Bob and Barb left, Susan sat quietly at her desk.

"Hey, I am the principal. Principals can make these decisions. You shouldn't have to 'get permission' from the faculty for everything you want to do in the school. You just call a faculty meeting and tell them. . . . But, it is true that I have tried to involve them in decisions at Revenue. . . .

"Do I want to go back to Dr. Brown and tell him I've changed my mind? No way!!!!!"

Well, now, what should I do next?

Analysis of Case

- What is a main issue?
- What are Susan Leeber's options?
- Where can she go for advice?
- What alternative ways might Mrs. Leeber have responded to the Superintendent's charge?
- Assuming you were Mrs. Leeber, what would you do?

Instructor's Notes
For
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Author's Intent:

To present a situation that illustrates the possible dilemma a principal could face when desiring to implement new school programs.

Discussion:

- What other information might have been helpful to you as you discussed this situation?
- Is Mrs. Leeber aware of the feelings and attitudes of the Revenue faculty?
- What alternative ways might Mrs. Leeber have responded to the Superintendent's charge?
- Assuming you were Mrs. Leeber, what would you do?

Extended Learnings:

- What are the pros and cons of participatory management?
- How does a principal decide what decisions are made through participatory management and which are not?