

The New Arrivals

Kathleen Brown,
University of Missouri-St. Louis

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.

The New Arrivals

Sam Tarantino is principal of a large city high school, Truman South H.S. The faculty numbers forty regular education teachers and six special education teachers, plus four coaches, five counselors, and a school social worker. Many of the staff at Truman South have grown up in this neighborhood, married and raised their families here, or else they relocated back in the neighborhood when they started their families.

The community in which Truman South is located is basically a working class community where the residents live in their own small homes or they rent living space in small, scattered apartment buildings. Part of the district includes a neighborhood shopping area that has been declining but recently has experienced an economic resurgence because of an influx of newly arrived immigrants to this country.

These immigrants come from a variety of places around the world, including Bosnia, Vietnam, Mexico, Ethiopia, and Senegal. Some of them are political refugees who fled oppression or out right civil war in their homelands. Others left their countries voluntarily to seek economic opportunity in the United States. Charitable organizations and community networks have helped them relocate here and find housing. Affordable housing and a low unemployment rate in the area attracted many to this community. Money for small businesses has been made available to open restaurants, cleaning businesses, and other local services.

While the influx of new residents has helped the area economically, it has presented some unique challenges in the school district. A large number of students from these immigrant families have now "hit" the high school, and they are arriving from several middle schools that feed the high school enrollment. Sam Tarantino began to look for ways to ease the transition for the newcomers to the high school and to help local residents and the existing student body accept students whose language, dress, appearance, and customs are very different from those of the neighborhood.

During the first week of teacher in-service prior to the start of school, Sam brought in a group of trainers from the "World of Difference" program. The staff spent two days talking about diversity and practicing their communication skills. Staff evaluations of this professional development effort were positive. Sam felt that the two days were worthwhile and that the school year would be off to a good start.

The first week of school was uneventful. Classes met, students found their lockers, teachers helped some of the new arrivals learn the block schedule (which had just been adopted the previous year). The second week of school, however, brought a few incidents of conflict. Two Vietnamese students began a fight in PE that carried over into the cafeteria. Sam immediately called in the parents and learned that the two boys were in rival groups that had formed during the summer. He consulted with local police to let them know about the two groups, and he

warned the two young men that his policy was "Zero Tolerance" for fighting in the school. One more fight and they were to be expelled.

Again, things seemed to go on without major incident for a couple of weeks. The principal dealt with the usual array of day-to-day problems in an urban high school. Then, a small group of Ethiopian parents called Sam and asked to meet with him. They were concerned about some racial taunts that had been directed at their children and their complaints were not handled well in the school office. Sam assured these parents their teens were safe at the school, and that he would discuss the language that some students had used when he gave his next daily PA address. Another student, this one from Senegal, was given a preliminary screening and placed in a special education class. His special education teacher felt that this was not an appropriate placement for him, and that he needed intensive English lessons, not remedial reading and math.

During the fifth week of school, Sam got a visit from one of his math teachers. Mr. Powers was concerned about the passive classroom behavior of some of the students from Bosnia and Mexico, particularly the young women, in his Algebra class. Mr. Powers is an excellent math teacher who really enjoys getting students to participate in hands-on learning activities and uses a lot of cooperative learning strategies to promote interaction. He was worried their lack of participation was holding them back. His grading policy was strongly based on class participation, and he was concerned that these young women would not be successful in his course. He looked to the principal for some advice.

Principal Tarantino (whose own parents had come to the U.S. from Italy after World War I) reflected on these problems and decided that he needed to supplement the diversity experience that the staff had received prior to the start of school. He also thought that the community as well as the school's non-certificated staff needed some diversity training. He proposed this to the faculty Professional Development Committee whose members responded that they were already "up to their ears" in work and could not take more time for "that diversity stuff." They felt the two days in the summer were more than adequate, and if the principal would be consistent with disciplining students there would not be any problems in the school. They wanted the fall professional development session to focus on the state's new standardized testing program.

When the principal proposed to the PTO leaders that they sponsor diversity training for the community, they responded that Mr. Tarantino was spending a lot of time on "those new people" and not enough on basic discipline. Parents were hearing stories at home about students being treated differently because they could not speak English. The PTO refused to recommend community-building strategies and planned to continue with their traditional PTO agenda for the rest of the school year.

Questions

- Should Mr. Tarantino press his case for additional cultural diversity training for the certified staff? Why, or why not?
- Should Mr. Tarantino promote cultural diversity training for the community? For the non-certified staff? Why, or why not?
- Give reasons that the principal should continue to get training for himself but give up the idea of additional staff and community development in this area.

Instructor Notes

For

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Author's Note

This case could easily become a "problem-based learning activity" by following Mr. Tarantino's efforts through the year. It could also become an extended role play with participants playing the role of different stakeholders. The author's intention was to create a situation with tension but lots of potential. The principal in this case has the knowledge and disposition for creating a collaborative learning community; he needs to develop performance-based skills at bringing these groups together. The case tries to get to the performance skills, given the values that the principal holds and which were reflected in the willingness of the staff and community to talk about these issues.

Extended Learning Opportunities

- Identify the "diverse community interests" in this scenario.
- Identify the issues in this situation. As principal, what process would you use to determine the most important priorities?
- If you were Mr. Tarantino and you wanted to pursue the goal of unifying the community through formal training programs, how would you include stakeholders from each group?
- Brainstorm some other steps that Mr. Tarantino might take to unify the school community or, at least, improve school climate.
- Identify some of the instructional problems facing Mr. Tarantino and the teachers in this situation.