

The Teachers' Lounge

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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.

Scenario:

New Principal Carl Bishop had had enough. He was deeply concerned about the negative environment at Blainey Elementary School in the middle of the school year. The Superintendent appointed him because the building was having problems. Teachers in the building seemed always to be in the teachers' lounge complaining about him, about the district, about the students, about anything and everything. Rumors were rampant: that he was planning to retire, or that he was to be reassigned, that there would be a new assistant principal, that the district would begin an all-day kindergarten program. Every week, it seemed a new set of speculations surfaced.

Mr. Bishop felt that he needed to do something to break the negative spiral and get the building back on a positive track. He sought advice from a district mentor who was familiar with the situation. The mentor advised Bishop to inform teachers that their lounge was to be reassigned as an instructional resource room. Teachers would thereafter take lunch in the cafeteria or in their rooms.

Your Reaction

- Do you agree with the advice from the principal's mentor? Why or why not. Cite relevant issues.
- What is the key issue here? What advice would you give to this principal?
- Analyze the situation from the following perspectives:
 - Principal
 - Veteran teachers in the building
 - Teachers association

Instructor's Notes and Scoring Guide

For

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To the Instructor

This case is intended to draw out comments regarding the principal's critical role in establishing a positive school climate and culture. Discussions may begin by relating issues of authority and control over physical space and resources: e.g., does the principal have the right to do this? More advanced discussion will move toward issues of participatory decision-making and ways to promote a positive school climate and to value contributions of all staff.

Extended Learning Opportunities

- Ask participants to describe other approaches that might be taken in this situation, and to explain their expected outcomes for each alternative.
- In the future, what steps could the principal take to avoid having a negative climate build-up in the building?
- Use the situation as extended role play, either scripted or improvisational. Assign roles to principal, veteran teachers, and other staff. Carry out a series of scenarios based upon suggested alternatives.

Scoring Guide

3 Points

The discussions are detailed, specific and convincing. They recognize the position of authority of the principal yet the key issue is seen as a problem of school climate or culture in which the principal needs to begin drawing staff together to support students. Taking unilateral action (even if warranted and within the principal's authority) will probably not improve the climate and may damage relations even further. This response reflects the need to consider the problems from a variety of perspectives and engage the community in conflict resolution.

2 Point

Responses are more general and less persuasive. They indicate some understanding of the parameters of the problem posed, but do not go far enough in seeing the potential complexity inherent in the situation.

1 Point

These responses fail to consider multiple perspectives and may resolve the issue legalistically or with the exercise of unilateral power. This response may rely heavily on the mentor's advice.

0 Point

This response avoids the issue or avoids taking any decisive step--basically a "do-nothing" approach.