

The Community Spills into the School

Michael Arnold

Southwest Baptist University

Jim Kern

Columbia College

A Problem Based Learning Activity

NOTE: *This problem-based learning activity is designed for students to receive this case in parts, not as an entire case. The students should review, discuss, and plan for action for each part prior to being given each subsequent part.*

Introduction

Frequently what goes on in a school has its genesis in the community. The values and preferences students express in school have their origin in their homes and their social friends or groups. Sometimes it is related to social class, or racial/ethnic dynamics, and other demographic dynamics.

The building administrator will have to deal with these community factors one way or another; they can not be ignored. The administrator's main responsibility in this regard is to work so that the community partners with the school so that the learning environment is extended into the community.

In this problem based learning activity, you will have to deal with a high school setting and an incident that started out innocently enough, but evolved into something much more conflictful. The nature of your responses to the various questions should be framed, for this exercise, in terms of the knowledge, dispositions and performance indicators of Standard 4 of the ISLLC standards.

Key Words:

- Diversity
- Community Demographics
- Collaboration
- Community Resources

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.

Knowledge Indicators

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- emerging issues and trends that potentially impact the school community
- the conditions and dynamics of the diverse school community
- community resources
- community relations and marketing strategies and processes
- successful models of school, family, business, community, government and higher education partnerships

Disposition Indicators

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- schools operating as an integral part of the larger community
- collaboration and communication with families

- involvement of families and other stakeholders in school decision-making processes
- the proposition that diversity enriches the school
- families as partners in the education of their children
- the proposition that families have the best interests of their children in mind
- resources of the family and community needing to be brought to bear on the education of students
- an informed public

Performance Indicators

The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that:

- high visibility, active involvement, and communication with the larger community is a priority
- relationships with community leaders are identified and nurtured
- information about family and community concerns, expectations, and needs is used regularly
- there is outreach to different business, religious, political, and service agencies and organizations
- credence is given to individuals and groups whose values and opinions may conflict
- the school and community serve one another as resources
- available community resources are secured to help the school solve problems and achieve goals
- partnerships are established with area businesses, institutions of higher education, and community groups to strengthen programs and support school goals
- community youth family services are integrated with school programs
- community stakeholders are treated equitably
- diversity is recognized and valued
- effective media relations are developed and maintained
- a comprehensive program of community relations is established
- public resources and funds are used appropriately and wisely
- community collaboration is modeled for staff
- opportunities for staff to develop collaborative skills are provided

Welcome, you may now proceed to access the Scenario and Parts 1-9
(These are to be worked on in order and without reference to any subsequent parts):

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Problem Scenario

It is a Saturday evening in early September. School has been in session for several weeks and a group of friends, primarily white students from the local high school, decide to head over to the local boys club to play some basketball and in general hang out. Upon arrival they encounter another group of students, primarily African-American, from the same high school with the same intentions.

Once a court opens up both groups head out onto the court and begin what each hope would be a fun evening. As the game progresses tempers begin to flare on both sides. Eventually one of the African-American students refers to a white student as a "cracker," to which that student answers back with "####."

Tempers flare and a fight starts on the court between the two boys. A member of the boys club runs to the court to break up the fight and remove both groups from the premises. As each group reluctantly leaves the building the white student is overheard saying, "I am going to get him Monday morning."

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Part 1

Monday Morning – 7:15 a.m.

As with most days you arrive early to your office, anxious to get the week off to a good beginning. This has been your practice since coming to the district in August. As you punch in your code to get your voice mail from the weekend you are taken back by the following message: “Mr. Bliss, this is Jim from the boys club here in town. I just wanted to give you a heads up on some trouble we had on Saturday between a group of your students. I managed to get it broken up, but John Everheart and Oscar Madison would not let it go. Hope nothing happens in school.”

You work your way through the rest of the messages and come to the last one: “Mr. Bliss, I just wanted you to know that I overheard John say he was going to bring a knife to school Monday and get Oscar. I just thought you should know.” With that the phone went dead and the caller left no name.

Question/Activity

Verbalize the dynamics of your internal and external school community with reference to:

- Knowledge indicator:
 - the conditions and dynamics of the diverse school community
- Disposition indicator:
 - schools operating as an integral part of the larger community

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Part 2

Monday Morning -- 8:15 a.m.

In an effort to avoid a conflict at school you plan to meet John Everheart at the door upon his arrival to school and ask him into the office. Upon seeing John you also notice Oscar in the parking lot yelling at the top of his lungs, "You better watch out white boy." You hurry John into your office and ask John about the situation that took place over the weekend between him and Oscar as well as the latest round of verbal repartee. John explains what happened and tells you it was no big deal. He hopes to speak with Oscar in order to work things out.

As a precaution you ask John to empty his pockets and book bag only to find a very large knife in his bag. As this is a direct violation of school policy and the Safe Schools Act you inform John he will be suspended for 10 days. You then ask John to sit back down and call his parents.

Question/Activity

1. Because this has the potential to develop into a physical crisis, and involves a violation of the Safe School Act, review the processes your school district or building implemented when the Safe School Act or your Crisis Management Plan was put in place with reference to
 - **Knowledge indicator:** successful models of school, family, business, community, government and higher education partnerships
 - **Disposition indicator:** resources of the family and community needing to be brought to bear on the education of students
 - **Performance indicator:** relationships with community leaders are identified and nurtured
2. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the process used to inform the internal and external publics regarding the Act and/or plan with reference to:
 - **Knowledge indicator:** successful models of school, family, business, community, government and higher education partnerships
 - **Disposition indicator:** resources of the family and community needing to be brought to bear on the education of students
 - **Performance indicator:** relationships with community leaders are identified and nurtured

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Part 3

Monday Morning – 8:40 a.m.

You now have Oscar in your office and begin to get his side of the story from Saturday night as well as the incident in the parking lot. You are surprised that both stories match and believe you can deal with this within school policy. You explain to Oscar that verbal abuse and threats will not be accepted on campus and suspend him for three days as per policy. You phone his mother and ask that she come to school to meet with you and pick up Oscar.

Monday Morning – 9:30 a.m.

John's mother arrives at school to meet with you regarding the knife. While John is waiting in the outer office she tells you that while she was unaware of him bringing the knife to school and does not approve of his actions, she believes he brought it to school for protection. She goes on to tell you that her son had received several threatening calls from an unknown person on Sunday.

Questions/Activity

What type of information would you need and/or whom would you speak with to prepare for the upcoming meetings with Mrs. Madison and Mrs. Everheart? Refer to:

- **Disposition indicators:** collaboration and communication with families and families as partners in the education of their children
- **Performance indicator:** community stakeholders are treated equitably.

Expand on the information you identified as to its importance in the upcoming meeting. Refer to:

- **Disposition indicators:** collaboration and communication with families and families as partners in the education of their children
- **Compare and contrast** the different types of information needed and expectations for each meeting.

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Part 4

Monday Morning -- 10:10 a.m.

News has spread quickly regarding your suspension of John for 10 days. The atmosphere in the halls is one of tension and confusion as the stories of the incident grow. You have already had several minor racial incidents reported to the office and while hopeful this will die down, deep down you believe it will not.

Monday Morning -- 10:30 a.m.

Oscar's mother arrives at school and is visibly upset at the prospect of her son being suspended from school. You explain the situation and hope that this will end the conflict. She asks what happened to the other boy and believes the punishment is too harsh for her son because his life was threatened.

Monday Morning -- 11:00 a.m.

You take a call from Mr. Everheart requesting a meeting with you. He states that he does not believe it is fair that his son and that the other student received two different levels of punishment. He informs you that he continues to receive threatening calls from unknown sources stating that if his son returns to school, he will regret it. You schedule the meeting for 2:00 realizing this incident may soon get out of hand.

Question/Activity

Outline what you believe a successful relationship with community leaders involves with reference to:

- **Knowledge indicator:** community relations and marketing strategies and processes
- **Performance indicator:** relationships with community leaders are identified and nurtured

List and discuss the leaders in your community you believe a principal should have contact with with reference to:

- **Performance indicators:** relationships with community leaders are identified and nurtured and there is outreach to different business, religious, political, and service agencies and organizations

How will you address a request for information regarding consequences about another student? With reference to:

- **Performance indicator:** community youth family services are integrated with school programs.

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Part 5

Tuesday Afternoon 3:00 p.m.

(9 days following the suspension)

Tensions have eased a bit over the past few days. The ebb and flow of tension grew upon Oscar's return and you brace yourself for round two. A phone message from your secretary interrupts your train of thought. "A Mr. Leeway, the President of the 'Parents Concerned About School Violence' called and wanted to let you know that if you allow John Everheart back into school there will be a large number of parents who will pull their children from your school. Additionally he feels that he must inform you that if this student is allowed to come back to school, his life may be in danger as he has heard of several threats from the African American community."

Question/Activity

What is your course of action in dealing with this organization? Who would you involve and why? Refer to:

- **Knowledge indicator:** the conditions and dynamics of the diverse school community
- **Performance indicators:** relationships with community leaders are identified and nurtured; there is outreach to different business, religious, political, and service agencies and organizations; credence is given to individuals and groups whose values and opinions may conflict

What is your obligation to John and his parents upon his return to school? Refer to:

- **Disposition indicators:** families as partners in the education of their children; the proposition that families have the best interests of their children in mind

Which organizations outside the school could help with this situation and how would you go about seeking their input and involvement? Refer to:

- **Performance indicators:** there is outreach to different business, religious, political, and service agencies and organizations; available community resources are secured to help the school solve problems and achieve goals

To what extent do you believe in an informed public in dealing with issues of a sensitive and confrontational nature? Your response should blend with your personal philosophy of educational administration. Refer to:

- **Disposition indicator:** an informed public

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Part 6

Tuesday Evening

You realize this problem is larger than you can handle. You have discussed this with your superior and consider informing your faculty of the potential problems, but time is of the essence.

Question/Activity

Listed below are several scenarios. Discuss the pros and cons of each with reference to:

- Disposition indicator: an informed public
- Meet with the entire faculty and staff.
- Meet with John's teachers only.
- Meet with Oscar's teachers only.
- Meet with John and Oscar's teachers together.
- Would not meet with faculty or staff.

What is your plan of action for John's return based on the information you have?

Refer to:

- **Disposition indicator:** an informed public
- **Performance indicator:** opportunities for staff to develop collaborative skills are provided

What impact will John's return and your subsequent plan have on the teaching and learning environment? Refer to:

- **Disposition indicator:** an informed public
- **Performance indicator:** opportunities for staff to develop collaborative skills are provided

Develop alternative courses of action to ensure the safety of John as well as the teaching and learning process. Refer to:

- **Disposition indicator:** an informed public
- **Performance indicator:** opportunities for staff to develop collaborative skills are provided

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Part 7

Thursday Morning 8:00 a.m.

As per your policy John and his parents meet with you before his reinstatement into the classroom. John and his parents are waiting outside your office. You begin to wonder if there is a net big enough for the butterflies in your stomach.

Questions/Activities

What will the basis of your discussion be? Refer to:

- **Disposition indicators:** collaboration and communication with families and the proposition that families have the best interests of their children in mind

What information would you share or not share with John and his parents? Give your rationale with reference to:

- **Performance indicator:** credence is given to individuals and groups whose values and opinions may conflict

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Part 8

Friday Morning 7:30 a.m.

The phone rings in your office. It is Mr. Everheart calling to inform you that he will be keeping John home today because they fear for his safety. He hopes that the weekend will put some distance between the situation and plans to bring John on Monday. Without offering any suggestions you thank Mr. Everheart for calling and add you hope so too. The day goes rather smoothly and you hope for a quiet restful weekend and a peaceful Monday.

Questions/Activities

What information is necessary prior to John's return Monday morning? Refer to:

- **Disposition indicators:** families as partners in the education of their children and resources of the family and community needing to be brought to bear on the education of students

Who would you speak with to gather the necessary information? Refer to:

- **Knowledge indicator:** successful models of school, family, business, community, government and higher education partnerships
- **Performance indicator:** information about family and community concerns, expectations, and needs is used regularly

What publics would you inform regarding the information you have obtained? Refer to:

- **Disposition indicator:** an informed public.

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Part 9

Monday Morning 7:30 a.m.

Like clockwork Mr. Everheart is in your office with John. You assure him that everything will be done to ensure his son's safety at school. As the bell rings for the beginning of class you send John off to first period with the assistant principal as an escort.

Questions/Activities

Develop three additional options that will ensure the safety of John as well as the integrity of the teaching and learning environment.

- Site school policy, law cases, and individuals that may assist in the plan.
- **Performance indicators:** there is outreach to different business, religious, political, and service agencies and organizations and available community resources are secured to help the school solve problems and achieve goals

Conclusion

Friday Afternoon 3:00 p.m.

The situation seems to have improved. The focus of the school is back on teaching and learning and who is dating whom. You smile as you wave goodbye to the busses and cars leaving your parking lot. Your cell phone begins to ring.....

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Instructors's Notes and Scoring Guide

Notes to the Instructor

This PBL activity is used to enlighten students on the importance of collaboration with families and community in a pluralistic society. Following are some ideas and suggestions related (1) to each part in the materials above, and (2) suggestions that are more general in nature.

Parts 1-9

Part 1

- Responses should include – Community Power Structure, Demographics,
- Socio-economic Conditions, Educational Attainment, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Religion, School's Hierarchy.
- The instructor may choose to have students bring in local policy as it relates to discipline of students off school grounds.

Part 3

The instructor may choose to have student's role play each side of the parent conference and critique it as a class.

Part 4

The instructor may choose to have students discuss techniques in defusing difficult situations as well as ways to deal with difficult people. Additionally the instructor may have students identify which school personnel would be helpful and outline their role in the process.

Part 5

The instructor may choose to have students develop/bring their philosophy of educational administration as it relates public involvement in the educational process.

Part 6

Compose a letter/memo to your superintendent outlining the situation and your current plan of action. The letter/memo should also state how you will evaluate the actions you are choosing.

Part 7

The instructor may choose to have students role play the parent conference and critique it as a class.

General Suggestions

The following activities may be accomplished individually or in small group settings.

- Students will research and develop a community relations plan that addresses outreach to different business, religious, political, and service agencies and organizations in addition to parents and non-parents,

- Students will present views as to the extent they believe administrators should be actively involved in community organizations,
- Students will develop a staff development activity based on developing collaborative skills needed to work in a pluralistic society.
- Collaboratively develop a crisis management plan. The plan should outline who will be involved and how the plan will be disseminated to the internal and external school community.
- Additional role playing activities may be incorporated.

Support Materials

The materials listed below are suggestions/recommendations that may be used to enhance the learning experience of each student. We recommend the student be responsible for gathering all data and supplemental material.

- Safe Schools Act
- Local school district's web-site (if applicable)
- Local school district's crisis management plan
- Laws that pertain to confidentiality and student rights
- Internal and external power bases
- Local civic groups
- Line-staff charts
- Local discipline policies
- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education web site

Scoring Guides

There are two scoring guides. One (Part 1) focuses on each individual Part of the learning activity. For example it used to give a score for the students products in, say, Part 5 of the PBL. The other scoring guide (Part 2) is to be used to derive a score for the student's work on all the parts combined and is focus solely on the performance indicators.

Part 1

The scoring guide is to be used for each activity throughout the problem-based learning module

Score	Description
4	<p>There is clear, comprehensive, and convincing evidence that the candidate demonstrates and articulates the standard's performance components. The evidence presented is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful • Insightful • Conclusive • Integrated • Complete
3	<p>There is clear evidence that the candidate demonstrates and articulates the standard's performance components. The evidence presented is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well developed • Effective and applicable • Reasonable and specific •
2	<p>There is limited evidence that the candidate demonstrates and articulates the standard's</p>

	<p>performance components. The evidence presented is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacking in breadth and depth • Lacking in complexity and/or consistency •
1	<p>There is little or no evidence that the candidate demonstrates and articulates the standard's performance components. The evidence is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vague • Irrelevant •

Part 2

This part of the scoring guide is to be used to score each individual performance holistically using the performance indicators criteria as they pertain to the problem-based learning module.

Performance Component	Little or No	Progressing	Proficient	Exemplary
Processes that foster the involvement of the community in the educational programs of the school
Processes that foster the involvement of the school in the life of the community.
Processes that foster the involvement of families in the educational programs of the school.
Processes that foster collaboration and communication among the members of the school and school community.
Processes that demonstrate diversity is valued.