

Charles A. Bonnici  
With a Foreword by Bruce S. Cooper

# Creating a Successful Leadership Style

Principles of Personal Strategic Planning



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*To my LSW (long-suffering wife), Christine, and my children, Stephen and Danielle, who had less of me as a husband and father than they deserved.*

*Even when I was home, I was emotionally drained from the day and often not there for them.*



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# Foreword

Attracting quality new leadership in education, particularly for those becoming effective school principals, is a truly difficult but important task. But, convincingly, Charles A. Bonnici, in this creative new book, tells and shows us just how to make leadership work in education, in living color, using poignant examples in real schools.

He uses a term not always found in the education leadership and the social science literature, the term *talented*—having those qualities that make good leaders. *Talented* is not so easily defined, but we know it when we see it. He brings this leadership preparation to life, using on-the-job examples to describe what good principals are, how to find and educate them, and then how to help them in their critical work.

Bonnici begins each chapter with strong, clear, practical advice and then gives examples that support this wisdom—in no uncertain terms. And the sage suggestions all make sense; the book begins by acknowledging that being a good school principal is a full-time, active, complex job: interacting with teachers and students; being everywhere at once (e.g., in the hall, the office, the schoolyard, and, don't forget, the classroom, to watch and interact with the teachers and their kids); and modeling and interacting positively with a wide range of adults and children.

In the first chapter, Bonnici urges principals to be “role models,” consciously and subconsciously acting on, and speaking up for, what they believe in and stand for. Using two real examples—Mr. Thelen, who is a principal of an inner-city school, and Ms. Rivera, a large suburban high school leader—Bonnici helps us to live and feel the experiences of these administrators as they worked to give form and substance to teachers’



curricula and instruction, without trying to overmanage the staff in the classroom.

These real examples give life and meaning to what Bonnici is saying and advising, as when Thelen's school had an active Keep Your School Clean campaign, and the principal stopped to pick up paper in the hall. Kids asked him what and why he was doing this. He replied, "This is our home for most of the day. It's our job to keep it clean." Some kids followed suit, picking up paper, while other looked wary and walked away. Mentoring and modeling are never easy, but the tone and direction, according to this book, start with the principal.

The second chapter, in much the same way, deals with real problems, and is entitled with ways to deal with them: "Don't Exacerbate; Defuse." Again, Bonnici uses living, poignant case stories to illustrate this advice.

For example, rather than fight with students about "elevator passes" in a school with several floors, the principal gives simple advice to make things work more smoothly, such as "Hold the elevator open until the student produces the pass for inspection. Simply say that none of us will go anywhere until you see the pass. In 90 percent of the cases, this will end the matter. A student without a pass will simply get off the elevator." No battles necessary, as the leader cools down the situation instead of inflaming it.

The other chapters are similar, revolving around giving advice on various topics, for example, listening more, speaking less (chapter 3) and giving more credit to others, and taking the blame for things oneself, when things go well or fail (chapter 4). Chapter 5 is about caring for people, not "shuffling paper." Chapter 6 covers finding the right people and then "letting the people fly," so they can do what they were hired to do. In chapter 7 Bonnici then urges principals to remember what teachers do and need, calling on their background and skills from when the administrators were themselves teachers; and in chapter 8 he urges principals to seek input from their teachers, using a School Leadership Team, based on "advisement and input" from those closest to the decisions (i.e., in the classrooms).

In chapter 9 Bonnici focuses on the need to accentuate the positives and to minimize the negatives, while in chapter 10 he stresses the need to "monitor the communication"; from there, Bonnici advises to remember support staff (chapter 11), mind details (chapter 12), and finally "stay

within the box,” not breaking the larger rules and contexts, for fear that a leader will go too far and possibly lose his or her job. For life can be unfair, Bonnici explains, so be careful and minimize the risks.

The book ends with many practical, useful details, including actual program schedules, helpful forms, and models for school leaders in a series of appendices. For example, appendix C is a real document (a sample parent newsletter article) for principals, done by a principal, explaining health and medical policies in the school: how students who are taking prescribed medications can come to a health clinic in the school if they cannot do the treatments themselves or are embarrassed to take the medicines in public. It is a very useful and thoughtful article.

This kind of advice and practical materials in the appendices tops off this highly useful book, which readers should find interesting, helpful, and worthwhile. The book thus puts the talents of real school leaders in full view and highlights the principles for the principal, those techniques and strategies for doing a superior job as a leader.

Share this book with others who might be interested in leadership in American schools, thus making a difference for their families, students, and teachers. For school is family, and talented leadership can make the community of children and adults work. Hence, as Bonnici shows, wisdom—passed to the next generation of leaders—is presented in this book and is important to the future of successful schools in our changing society.

Bruce S. Cooper, Ph.D.

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# Preface

Does anyone need another book on educational leadership? Probably not. Yet, when we consider that few talented educators want to become principals or department chairs or assistant principals or even supervisory master teachers, perhaps we should wonder if the current literature on leadership actually reflects what teachers see in their schools. And when we consider the high turnover rate (i.e., failure rate) for school leaders, we should wonder if all the books and articles are providing them with adequate preparation. This comes at a time when the need for talented school leaders has never been greater.

Why is this book different? How will it convince the most talented teachers to become school leaders? How will it lower the supervisory failure rate?

This is not an ivory tower book. Not that coming from academia is a negative, but sometimes the university can be divorced from the day-to-day reality of the school. There are forty years of actual experience in this book, covering the gamut from classroom instruction to principal to even college adjunct. The content is not based on a set of theories or research studies, but on the real experiences of a teacher and school leader. The suggestions and advice are direct and practical.

This book is not about statistically defined schools or students or the “average” teacher. It has a cast of real people. There is humor, pathos, tragedy, as there is in your school, your extended family.

Most texts on educational leadership provide generalizations based on research and theory. You are then asked to extrapolate specifics from them. This book provides the specifics and eschews the generalities. As

a teacher, you developed a repertoire so you could better motivate your students to higher levels of achievement. Some of your techniques were learned in your education courses; many more from your mentor or cooperating teacher; even more from your more experienced colleagues when you found a position. You developed your personal teaching style and methodology from these menus of options, selecting what worked best for you and your students.

This book is such a menu of options for the prospective, new, or experienced school leader. Some items you will find to be perfect “as is,” and you will incorporate them into your style. Some you will find need tweaking to fit your personality or your school’s culture. Some options will cause you to throw your hands up in the air and exclaim, “You’ve got to be kidding!”—these menu items just do not mesh with your supervisory persona or the culture of your school. Of course, you will be adding other items not in this book that have worked for you and those who have helped you on your path to school leadership. I would like to hear about these. E-mail me at [profchuck1@verizon.net](mailto:profchuck1@verizon.net). None of us has a monopoly on wisdom when it comes to the art of leading a school.

What will you find here that you might not find in some other like-themed books? You will find a book based on practice, not theory. The students in the educational leadership courses I taught had had enough theory. They wanted to know how to deal with the real day-to-day problems. How do you handle student complaints about a competent but not very likeable teacher? What do you do when your deans start treating all students as miscreants? How do you handle organizations that want to rent school space for questionable reasons? What do you do when a parent storms into your office screaming profanities? These are among the day-to-day issues that this text addresses.

I was a New York City high school teacher, assistant principal of supervision, and principal. My point of view is that of an educator in a large urban area with a diversity of populations. The examples and anecdotes that follow come from this experience. However, they are universal in application because a school, whatever the level or size or location, is still a school with the same goals and issues. The district office, whether in New York City or Los Angeles or Boise or Kansas City, is still a district office, a bureaucracy.

Is this book relevant to you if you do not plan to become a school leader? Yes. If you are interested in how the mind of a school leader works and how a school leader uses a supervisory style in his daily interactions with the myriad of people and situations in a school, you will enjoy this book. True, the school leader is me, and my mind and point of view are neither brilliant nor unique; however, this is true of most school leaders, ordinary people trying to do an extraordinary job in an increasingly complex society. Anyone interested in the world of modern education will glean insights into how leaders lead, schools operate, and children learn.

When you finish this book, you may wonder whether the various principals, assistant principals, and teachers mentioned in this book are real people or figments of my imagination. They are all real. The principals are all avatars of this author, representing different stages of my own career and experience.



# Introduction

How often does a school leader reflect on what he or she does on a day-to-day basis? When your day is filled with training and supporting teachers, being visible in the hallways, defusing issues before they become union grievances or media exposés, answering the latest urgent e-mail or fax requests from a central office, dealing with allegations of corporal punishment—you do not have much time to sit back and reflect on what you are doing. When you arrive home at whatever hour, you can't tell your LSS (long-suffering spouse) that you need quiet time to reflect.

When school leaders do find the time to reflect, whether while on a retreat or while preparing curriculum for a leadership course, they discover that on a daily basis they generally operate under certain personal principles that shape their visions, decisions, and strategic planning for the school. I did just this while preparing to teach a one-week institute on strategic planning for candidates in the leadership program at Pace University. The principles described in this book have been honed by teaching this course for ten years.

These fourteen operational catchphrases are a menu of options for you. They are explained and illustrated. The downside of several has not been ignored. You may find that they help you develop your supervisory style and persona.





## *Chapter One*

# **Always Be a Role Model**

This sounds simple, but it is of paramount importance. People, whether they are students, parents, teachers, or any of the other members of a school's staff, pay far more attention to what you do rather than to what you say. They will pay more attention to what you say if they respect what you do.

When you take on a leadership position, it is important that you try to make a positive impact on the lives of the teachers you supervise and on the instruction of the students you are responsible for. If this impact improves instruction, so much the better, for you will present yourself as a role model in this key area. As you move into a position, analyze the department or school. What can you do quickly to make an improvement? The following anecdote illustrates this principle.

Mr. Thelen, an experienced teacher at an inner-city high school, began his career as an assistant principal of supervision mid-year, at the beginning of the spring semester. He knew he would be the "interim acting" as early as November. As his scheduled classes ended by noon, his principal released him in the afternoon during December and January to meet his new staff, organize his office, and learn what his principal expected.

His new department was composed of good teachers who lacked focus. The department was currently under the negligent supervision of the social studies assistant principal. Mr. Thelen was told that prior to this time, the department had been left to its own devices by an assistant principal who sat in her office and fell asleep under an open copy of the *New York Times*. He could not determine if this were the truth or a school myth.

Mr. Thelen found no substantive curriculum materials. There was a one-page list of spelling words for each of the eight semesters of English. There were no textbook lists for each course. Teachers taught the same book regardless of what semester's course they were teaching. Finally, there was a general feeling that, as one guidance counselor told Mr. Thelen, "English is English—it makes no difference in what order students take their courses, does it?"

An even more immediate problem was a sense of dread at the opening of the semester. Back in 1981, methods of programming students had not changed since the days of the one-room schoolhouse. Unfortunately, they didn't work in this school of 2,400 students. During the first four weeks of every semester, there were massive program changes, such that half of a teacher's class register might change before it stabilized. After their first semester, students realized that with such massive register changes, there could be no sequential instruction, so many decided to do nothing for the first four weeks.

In the proverbial vicious cycle, teachers, knowing their classes would change every day for several weeks, reverted to nonsequential instruction and gave few, if any, assignments, justifying the attitude of the students.

This organizational problem also had existed in Mr. Thelen's old school, but over several years, "uniform lesson plans" were developed for each course so that on a given day, each teacher of a course taught the same material and gave the same assignment. For example, if there were four teachers of eleventh-year English, each would teach the same topic on Monday and have the same assignment due for Tuesday. The uniform plans provided a suggested lesson plan, but teachers were free to adjust or alter it to their own styles as long as they covered the specified material.

When classes were equalized and students in eleventh-year English were shifted, little instruction was lost. If, seven days into the semester, they were moved from an eleventh-year English class during period 2 with Ms. A to the same level class in period 8 with Mr. B, the topics covered and assignments given in both classes would have been the same. Because of late-arriving summer school results and human errors in programming, some students moved from one level class to another (say from sophomore to junior English). The uniform plans did not address the needs of these students. Fortunately, this accounted for a low percentage of the changes.

Mr. Thelen's new school needed such uniform lesson plans; however, there was no time to get committees together or to align such plans with the course curricula since course curricula did not exist. Based on his own experience, this new assistant principal of supervision created four sets of uniform plans, one for each English course offered in the spring.

During several meetings with the department's teachers held before the semester began, Mr. Thelen distributed the plans he developed and explained the purpose of having such uniform plans at the beginning of a semester. Once he assured the teachers that they could adapt the plans to their own styles, the idea was generally accepted because it solved a problem. It also reduced the planning workload for newer teachers, giving them extra time to plan for the coming semester. Finally, it reduced disciplinary issues as students learned they would be held accountable for work previously taught.

Mr. Thelen could have told teachers that instruction was a priority and the loss of four weeks of instruction was unacceptable. He could have said it was important to develop standardized curricula that allowed for teacher personalization. Words are cheap. By rolling up his sleeves, providing materials, explaining how these materials would create an ambience for learning from day one of the semester, and allowing teachers the freedom to cover topics in their own way, he sent these messages by doing rather than saying.

Mr. Thelen's actions laid the groundwork for the future. With the input of teachers, reference to state and district curricula guidelines, and recognition of the specific needs of students, Mr. Thelen and his staff developed standardized curricula packets for all courses taught. These packets included required topics, a textbook list, and suggested time frames and methods. To use today's terminology, they established standards for each course of study.

This took four years. When Mr. Thelen took on this position in the 1980s, there was less of a sense of urgency to accomplish everything that needed to be done in one year. In his first year as an assistant principal, Mr. Thelen taught ninth-year students, and working with other ninth-year teachers, he developed the curriculum for the ninth-year courses. In subsequent years, he followed a similar procedure with grades 10, 11, and 12. As a course of study was devised for each course, so were new uniform plans aligned to that course of study, forming the first unit of instruction.

In addition, Mr. Thelen created a file of materials for each course and made it accessible to all staff members. Every lesson he created was made available to the entire department. Others were encouraged to add to the file so that future teachers of the course would have not only a curriculum guide, but a wealth of lesson plans, handouts, examinations, and general materials developed by those who previously taught the course. By sharing everything, this assistant principal role modeled that in a community of learning, professionals share for the benefit of all.

His next step was to start over. Over the next four-year period, each course of study was revised, based on experience, new directives, and the needs of a changing student body.

Nothing worked perfectly. There was always the teacher who would not use the uniform plans. Very few teachers came to planning sessions to create the new courses of study, but many were quick to criticize what had been developed. Only about half the staff regularly added to the curriculum files.

In the real world, this is often what happens. For the most part, in the 1980s and still today, teachers want a supervisor to provide the ambience in which they are able to teach successfully. In this example from 1981, this meant that when students came into a sophomore English class, teachers could be reasonably sure of what their students had learned in their freshman year, would know what their students had to learn this year, and could see how this would be the basis for instruction in the next year.

Since formal planning meetings were poorly attended (usually the assistant principal and one other teacher), more informal methods were used. There were many conversations. As materials were developed, Mr. Thelen gave drafts to appropriate staff members with a request for feedback. When the final curriculum guides were ready, he could include a thank-you to several staff members for their ideas and input. When the inevitable negative comments came, he could truthfully say that every opportunity for input had been given and that all staff members would now try to use what was developed before making more changes.

Remember, this was before computers, before word processing programs, before Ctrl+C (copy) and Ctrl+V (paste). Everything was manually typed. The technology for continuous revision did not exist.

When a school leader is new to the staff, whether of a department or of the entire school, he needs to earn the trust of his staff. The previous

anecdote illustrates the earning of this trust in the school leader's most important role, that of instructional leader. However, sometimes a single action done on the spur of the moment can earn trust if it validates the work of the staff.

Several years later, Mr. Thelen became the "interim acting" principal of the same academic-vocational school. This neophyte principal used the six-month interim acting grace period to learn about the key people and systems in the school.

In our modern world, the method of choice as personified by a succession of corporate chancellors in New York City has been to assume that everything and everyone that exists is part of an extensive problem so that drastic changes are needed. Ironically, as school system heads go about eliminating dysfunctional systems, they also dismantle systems that worked. As they encourage the retirement of those who understood the history and workings of a massive bureaucracy, they create more problems than they solve.

Perhaps our age of instant communication and ever more efficient computer chips has led us to believe that we must reinvent school systems every year or two, just as we replace our once state-of-the-art-and-now obsolete computers and cell phones. However, schools are people places, and education is more art than science. So is educational leadership. It is better to know who and what you have before you bring in "experts" to fix everything. Our new principal found that most of the teachers and administrators he inherited were dedicated professionals, including the many vocational teachers who were very worried about having a principal from an academic background.

Mr. Thelen's first real crisis came on the day of the annual fashion show. Just as other schools have theatrical performances or class "sings," this academic-vocational school had a very elaborate annual fashion show, featuring garments designed, constructed, and modeled by students. Before the public shows, where the extended school community could whoop it up in celebration of the talents of the students, there was the "industry" presentation where supporters from the garment industry and their invited guests were given a private show.

For the students and staff this industry show was an important event where these supporters could see the results of their donations of expertise, fabric, and money, and where new partnerships could be formed.

A few hours before this industry show, the interim acting principal received a call from one of the best fashion design teachers. There was an emergency: The 1940s-era steam iron in her room wouldn't work, and the school's mechanic could not be found despite several announcements over the loudspeaker. Mr. Thelen immediately went to the room to speak with the teacher. She and her students were distressed because their garments could not be properly pressed and prepped before the big show.

As an assistant principal of supervision, Mr. Thelen had learned to fix department machinery, everything from now-obsolete rexograph machines to photocopiers. This is a necessary skill for department chairpersons. Unfortunately, his skill did not extend to pre-World War II steam irons, and the repairs he attempted did not work.

Mr. Thelen called the main office and had another loudspeaker announcement made. He called the assistant principal of organization and the lead school security guard to put out an "APB." He then personally went around the school to every place the mechanic could possibly be: vocational classrooms, the lunchroom, different offices, and the basement workshops.

Periodically, he called the teacher to see if the missing mechanic had made his way to her room. As Mr. Thelen was entering the subterranean passages of the boiler room, his secretary came over the loudspeaker to say that the missing mechanic had been found and was addressing the problem.

The mechanic had forgotten it was fashion show day and was out of the building eating a leisurely lunch. As soon as he appeared at the front entrance, a security guard brought him to fix the steam iron. All the interim acting principal's efforts to find him had failed. However, he gained the respect of the vocational teachers when word spread that their principal had spent the good part of an hour personally searching the building for the mechanic. This single act validated the work of these vocational teachers. This unsuccessful search assured them that their new principal understood that their work was important. When Mr. Thelen was going through the interview process to become the permanent principal, he had the support of the vocational teachers on the selection panel.

In this era of high-stakes testing, you may be faced with a variety of testing issues. Every few years there is a problem with the New York State

Regents Examinations, standardized tests used in middle and high schools. Often, this issue takes the form of answer sheets for one test somehow being made available prior to the test, usually because of the failure of a school to follow the prescribed security protocols. Even when the problem occurs in only one school in the entire state, the fallout affects all.

Ms. Rivera, principal of a large suburban high school in New York State, knew that there would be inspection teams making the rounds during a June testing period because of a serious incident that had occurred the previous semester. Working with the assistant principal of organization, she made sure that all protocols were being followed.

On the first exam day in June, Ms. Rivera arrived at the school at her usual early hour and verified with the assistant principal of organization that all procedures were in place. The exams and answer sheets were locked in the basement vault and would not be brought up until one hour prior to the start of the test. Ms. Rivera then picked up a copy of the testing room assignments and decided to make sure the rooms themselves were in order. She was appalled by what she found.

The school's *Teacher Handbook* provided proctors with their responsibilities during testing. One was setting up rooms by removing any posters or other materials relevant to the exam and arranging the room appropriately. However, proctors usually did not arrive at the testing rooms until about fifteen minutes before the exam began because, according to the test protocols, they could not be given the exams until just before they were scheduled to begin. This did not allow proctors the time to put the rooms in order.

Ms. Rivera found that there were few posters, as most teachers removed them before the summer vacation, but the desks were haphazardly arranged, some even set up for small-group learning from the last class of the previous day.

There were few other people in the building at 7:30 a.m. and those who were there were responsible for getting the exams ready for distribution. So, the principal went up to the top floor and, room by room, began arranging the desks in the appropriate manner for an exam: long rows with wide spaces between to minimize the possibility of roving eyes and facilitate movement around the room by the proctor. About halfway through this task, a teacher saw her working and asked what she was doing. After receiving a quick explanation, he joined Ms. Rivera,



as did others along the way. By doing, the principal demonstrated what needed to be done.

Before the next testing, Ms. Rivera made sure procedures were improved. Each chairperson was asked to devote part of the department conference before the testing week to reviewing correct procedures. On the last day of regular instruction, the last teacher in each room was asked to arrange the room for testing. On the day of each testing, department chairs were to check the rooms where their tests were being given to be sure the rooms were in proper order. Test room arrangement was added to the principal's new teacher workshop on proper testing procedures.

Recently, a graduate student in the administrative internship seminar at Pace University brought in a case statement in which she described a recent problem in her school: A student had been observed using a cell phone during a Regents Examination. She also brought in a copy of new Regents testing procedures, which require that students turn off all cell phones during examinations and warned that cell phone use during a test could invalidate a student's exam. It is appropriate that the revised instructions are mindful of the latest technology. As a school leader, remember that new technology always leads to more problems, as with text messaging, the modern version of the surreptitiously passed crib note.

Despite the mounds of paperwork and meetings expected of them, principals must be visible to staff and students. This visibility provides a daily opportunity to be a role model. Part of a good visibility program is to spend at least one period a day on a walkabout around the school. This will involve starting on the top floor and working your way down around the school; however, you should also have a list of stops you wish to make. These should be the offices of different staff members you want to touch base with, either because you have not spoken to them in a while or because you want to bounce an idea off one of your sounding boards. Sometimes it will involve other duties as well.

Let's return to Mr. Thelen, principal of an inner-city school. The assistant principal of pupil personnel services (i.e., guidance) had begun a Keep Your School Clean campaign. She was appalled by the way some students just threw refuse in the halls and on the stairwells even though there were plenty of trash receptacles around the school. She enlisted students in art classes to make a series of Keep Your School Clean-themed

posters for display around the school. Items were included in the weekly bulletin. The revised *Student Handbook* already included a new regulation (approved by parents) about keeping the school clean. Teachers were asked to have students keep classroom desks and floors trash free.

As Principal Thelen roamed the school during his walkabout, he picked up any trash he saw. Students out of their rooms with passes would ask, “Why are you picking up trash? This isn’t the principal’s job.” He replied, “This is our home for most of the day. It’s our job to keep it clean.” Some shook their heads and walked on; others started to pick up garbage themselves. The school did become cleaner, though there was always some refuse on the floors. For the rest of his tenure as principal, Mr. Thelen was seen serving as a role model by picking up trash as he walked around the school.

Some of the “principles” in this book have a downside, even *Always Be a Role Model*. It is difficult to maintain an image, to stay calm, to never “lose it.” This is particularly true when most of the major problems you face are caused by adults who should know better, by teachers and other administrators who exacerbate rather than defuse.

Mr. Pfizer, the principal of a midwestern middle school, had a way to deal with some of this internal anger. He had a storage room in the back of his office, separated from the office by two walls and two doors. On the bad days, he would go to this back room, close the doors, and kick file cabinets. You will find that doing something like this for only a minute or so will relieve your tension and help you through the rest of the day.

Being a role model contributes to stress because you cannot always be yourself, saying what you feel. You bring this stress home, and it takes a toll on your family life. You will tend not to talk about your workday at home; sometimes, you just do not want to relive the day again. But not everything can be kicked into a file cabinet. The underlying anger and disappointment linger in the mind, draining you emotionally and sometimes leaving very little patience and emotion for your family. Dentists have a very high divorce rate. Has anyone done a study on the divorce rate of principals? A principal with an understanding spouse is fortunate.

The preceding examples of being a role model range from the sublime to the mundane, but together they show that the school leader must be the

role model for all things great and small. In many ways, most of this book is about role modeling, especially in the myriad interpersonal encounters that occur day in and day out. You will see examples of this in the following chapters.

## *Chapter Two*

# **Don't Exacerbate; Defuse**

This chapter was originally entitled “Be Nonconfrontational,” but that moniker made it sound like one should be wimpy and avoid sticky issues. That isn't the intention. In a way, this principle parallels the physician's Do No Harm mantra. This chapter will describe how to defuse the inevitable confrontations that school leaders face daily.

Master teachers rarely have confrontations with students, parents, or their own colleagues. When a potentially volatile situation arises, they stay calm. Their very demeanor (body language and voice tone) prevents the matter from getting out of hand. Such master teachers rarely send students to a dean or assistant principal for disciplinary action. When an irate parent comes to see these teachers, the parent usually leaves satisfied. If they have a disagreement with a colleague, they resolve it.

However, the stress is on the word *usually*. School leaders have to handle those few situations when even the master teachers fail. They also have to handle the many situations that non-master teachers should have resolved but didn't. The role of the school leader in handling confrontations is twofold: to resolve the most difficult issues before they get to the superintendent or local media, and to train all staff to defuse rather than exacerbate a situation.

Let's begin with an illustrative anecdote. Manhattan High School is a vertical site, a rarity in New York City. Instead of being a three- or four-story building spread out over half a city block, it is ten-story building compacted in the middle of the street. There are elevators on both the east and west sides of the building. The east elevators are designated as student

elevators. Students use them during change of period, when they only stop at designated floors (1, 5, and 9) to speed movement; at other times, they stop on all floors.

The west elevators are staff elevators. They stop on all floors at all times to permit staff to have quick access to their rooms. They are also used administratively for deliveries and by the custodial staff to transport maintenance equipment. These staff elevators are available to students with disabilities so they have access to all floors at all times. Such students are issued special passes by the health coordinator, based on physician's notes. Some students with chronic disabilities (severe asthma is the most common) are provided with permanent elevator passes; those with temporary disabilities (such as sprained ankles or broken legs) are given dated temporary passes.

A favorite student ploy is to try to illegally use the teacher elevators. For some, this is pure sloth: They want to use the most direct route. For others, it is part of the "Let's see what I can get away with" game. Either way, it was a continual source of student-teacher confrontation until the principal took action.

Here's the way it played out: A student would get on the elevator. A teacher would ask to see her elevator pass. The student would fumble in her book bag or purse, looking flustered. The teacher would become irate and tell her to get off the elevator. The student would respond in kind to this negative manner. Soon a shouting match would ensue, the dean would be called, and the student would face a short suspension for showing disrespect to the teacher. In other words, the student would miss instruction because she tried to get on the wrong elevator.

This made no sense. The principal, Ms. Valletta, accepted the fact that many teenagers are lazy by nature and will look for the easiest way to get from point A to point B. She accepted the fact that trying to get away with breaking a rule is an adolescent game. Given that, she met with staff and asked them to follow certain defusing procedures when confronting students on the staff elevators:

- When a student gets on a staff elevator, ask to see the student's elevator pass. (Students were now being advised by the health coordinator to keep this pass with their IDs and transportation passes so they could be located easily.)

- Hold the elevator open until the student produces the pass for inspection. Simply say that none of us will go anywhere until you see the pass. (In 90 percent of the cases, this will end the matter. A student without a pass will simply get off the elevator.)
- If the student doesn't leave, ask to see the student's ID. (Students know that refusing to show an ID when asked by a staff member is a more serious offense.)
- If none of the above works, say nothing, and let the doors close. When the student exits, follow her to her class. Ask her teacher for the student's name and ID number. Report the same to the deans who will follow up. If you have a class to get to and cannot do this, forget the matter and go to your class. Even though the student "won" this time, she will eventually "lose" and find herself in the dean's office.
- The dean will follow up, usually with a warning for the first offense, not a suspension, as it was a matter of illegally being on an elevator, not talking back to or confronting a teacher.

These instructions had to be repeated periodically, but the number of elevator incidents declined. As the school became smaller and more students were recognizable to more staff members, the situation improved even more. In addition, teachers could apply what they learned from the elevator situation to defuse issues that might arise in their classes.

You might be wondering why Ms. Valletta didn't simply ask students to wear their ID cards and elevator passes on a chain or string around their necks, as is common in many businesses and schools. She felt it was unfair to ask students to do this unless staff also did so. For whatever reason, the various union representatives she worked with would never agree to requiring staff to wear their IDs.

This was a minor issue and not one that was worth pursuing, given that the school had a good ambience. During Ms. Valletta's final years as principal, she always wore her ID and she noticed that a number of staff members also began to do so. Perhaps if she had started being a role model earlier, staff IDs would not have been an issue.

Almost every week, a school leader will have a meeting with an irate parent. The problem will usually center on what the parent perceives as unfairness on the part of a staff member: an unfair grade, an unfair

suspension, or a rude remark. By the time the parent reaches the office of the administrator, she will be quite angry, feel she has been given the runaround by the staff, and think no one wants to help her or her child.

The school leader who is himself a parent will better understand her feelings. When a child tells a parent that he has been treated badly, the parent has the most primitive of automatic responses: protection of one's young. This situation has not been helped by a sensational press that makes headlines out of the dumb things done by a miniscule minority of teachers and administrators, making it sound like all educators are uncaring and unfeeling.

How can the school leader defuse such a situation? First, he sees the parent immediately, regardless of what he is doing. To make the parent wait and fume longer will only add fuel to the fire. The leader personally escorts the parent into his office, introduces himself, and offers her a chair. He does not use his desk as a barrier. He sits in front of his desk in a chair directly facing the parent and then asks, "How can I help you?" He lets the parent talk without interruption, allowing the parent to vent her anger and frustration.

Once the parent has spent this anger, the school leader can begin the meeting: "Thank you for coming to see me. I need to understand the problem better. I am going to take down some information so I can help you and your child." On a 6 × 8 index card, he writes down basic information he elicits from the parent: her name, her telephone number, the best time to call, the name of the child, and the name of the teacher involved.

He takes notes as the parent describes the problem. Periodically, he repeats what is said to be sure he understands the parent. The parent will be calmed when she sees that the administrator is making a record of the complaint, a sure indication that she and her problem are being taken seriously.

The school leader concludes the meeting by explaining that there are many sides to every incident. Most parents are already familiar with the old adage that there are at least three versions of every story: one side, the other side, and the truth. The administrator explains that the parent's child has given one side, but he needs to investigate further. He may talk directly with her child and with other appropriate staff members. He may also talk to other students who were present at the time of the reported incident.

Having reached some sort of agreement with the parent, the truly competent administrator asks a potentially dangerous question: "What do you want me to do to solve this problem?" If all he has done so far has had the desired effect, the parent is now calm and speaking as a rational adult rather than a parent in the protective mode. In most cases, the parent will tell the administrator to do what he thinks is fair to all. Yes, sometimes the parent will say, "Fire him!" The administrator will then have to explain the disciplinary procedures he has to follow.

The school leader who uses such strategies will find that most parents leave his office satisfied that he will investigate as promised. They will trust that they will receive a report by the next day. The parent will not always get the result she wanted, but if she perceives that the administrator tried to be fair to everyone involved, she will accept the result. The school leader's final clincher is to give the parent his private line phone number and ask her to call anytime in the future if there is another problem; he will personally handle the matter.

The index card is a useful tool for the new school leader. Experienced principals keep index cards in a "problem file box" right on their desks, or have an e-file with the same information kept electronically. If the new school leader does the same, after a year she will discover that a relatively small number of parents come to see her. In a typical school, fewer than 3 percent of the students will have an index card. Most cards will document one incident, but a modest few will document multiple incidents and meetings. Usually, those students will have large files in the dean's office as well.

The school leader will see this same convergence with staff members. Most of the complaints she receives will concern the same few staff members. In some cases, either she or another staff member with special expertise needs to speak with these teachers about better ways to cooperate with students and parents. Sometimes, it is useful to ask the union representative to do this. This makes the discussion unofficial while at the same time conveying to the teacher that the union may not be able to successfully defend inappropriate words or actions.

In New York City, a relatively recent chancellor's regulation on "verbal abuse" took the judgment of the principal out of some situations and brought in outside investigators. Teachers who make inappropriate remarks to students could find themselves without a job.



Not every parent will leave the school office satisfied. Sometimes, the parent will storm out. Mr. Pfizer, the middle school principal, knew where such a parent was headed and called the district office to speak with the assistant in charge of guidance, who usually handled parental issues. The problem was explained and relevant documents scanned and e-mailed.

That the parent went to the superintendent was Mr. Pfizer's failure, but giving the district assistant advance warning made it easier for her to respond. The parent was informed that the principal would be called and would be directed to handle the matter.

New regulations, policies, or requirements are always a potential source of confrontation. At the time of enforcement, students or parents can claim they were never informed, creating a difficult situation for school leaders. A change in a district's graduation process is probably one of the most difficult to address and one Principal Thelen faced early in his career.

Two years after Mr. Thelen became principal, the chancellor of New York City Public Schools announced a new graduation policy: No student would be permitted to take part in the June graduation ceremony unless he or she completed all the graduation requirements. Some schools already had this policy. Mr. Thelen's school did not.

Whether students should be allowed to march in the ceremony had been an issue previously discussed by his Academic Affairs Committee. (State Department of Education regulations require that each school have such a committee to decide on course accreditation and graduation issues. Many school districts require schools to have similar committees.) This committee was composed of parents, students, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators.

Some felt that marching at graduation with one's class was a once-in-a-lifetime event and should not be denied to any student—marching did not mean the student actually received a diploma. Others felt marching but not receiving a diploma sent students the wrong message and confused parents. A student needed to earn the right to march by actually earning a diploma.

In the end, a compromise was reached: Any student within three requirements of graduation would be permitted to march in June. The missing requirements (any combination of courses or required examinations) could be met through summer school work.

The chancellor's directive took the decision out of the school's hands. According to the directive, the school could make no exceptions to the regulation. A student and parent could appeal to the superintendent and then the chancellor.

As soon as this regulation was issued, Mr. Thelen included it in his parent newsletter and continued to include it in the three subsequent mailings. He mentioned it at every Parent Association meeting and added it to parent handouts. Then he personally visited every senior English class and gave a one-period lesson on graduation requirements and the chancellor's regulation. Each student was given two copies of the outline of this lesson, which included the exact wording of the chancellor's regulation. Students brought one copy home to show their parents. On the other they signed this statement:

I verify that the principal came to speak to my class today to explain the graduation requirements and the chancellor's regulation on participation in the June graduation ceremony. I further verify that I will show a copy of this handout to my parent.

This signed version was returned to the principal. Spare copies were left with the teachers so they could obtain signed copies from absentees.

In June, several angry parents lined up outside Mr. Thelen's office. In general, the issue was the same: The whole family was traveling to the city to see their child graduate—"I know my child didn't earn a diploma, but why can't he take part in the ceremony?" The principal had his documentation ready. The one document that ended the issue was the verification paper signed by the student. At that point, anger was deflected from this principal to the student. Some parents did go to the superintendent and even the chancellor. To their credit, both administrators backed their own policy completely once they verified that the principal had documentation proving the parents had been informed.

The next year, Mr. Thelen added a new topic to his talk to the seniors: being truthful with one's parents about one's prospects for graduation.

There were two cases in which Mr. Thelen personally appealed to the superintendent for a variance. In both cases, severe illnesses were involved, either of the student or the student's parent. These were documented. In both cases, the student was allowed to march.

All the actions described above, from the items in the parent newsletter to the lesson taught to the student verification form, were designed to defuse a problem looming for the final days of the school year. They also illustrate another important task of every school leader implicit in many of the principles described in this book: Always have a paper trail.

Some potential issues involve the school neighborhood. Most rural and many suburban schools are isolated, away from residential and business areas. Principals of these schools will have few, if any, neighborhood issues. Principals of urban schools, however, frequently face them.

Ms. Valletta's Manhattan High School was located in the middle of a residential block in New York City's Chelsea area. During her long tenure as principal, the neighborhood moved up the socioeconomic ladder, way up. At first, there were periodic telephone calls from neighbors (who apparently spent their days looking out their windows at the school) about two students fighting in a classroom or a student throwing something or other out the window. The assistant principal in charge of school security investigated these matters and then telephoned the caller to assure him or her that the matter was being handled. However, it is always better to be proactive rather than reactive.

One issue that was particularly annoying to the neighborhood residents was students sitting on the steps of their brownstones, sometimes blocking egress and often leaving fast food wrappings in their wake. This was an issue that could be addressed proactively.

Beginning on the first day of school in September, Ms. Valletta began patrolling outside the building about twenty minutes before the beginning of the first period class. During a one-hour patrol, she would walk up and down the block and across the street, ushering students into the school building or to a position in front of the school building. She developed a script to admonish students on the steps of a brownstone:

Good morning! I'm glad to see you're early for school today. We have a good neighbor policy: We don't sit on our neighbors' property. Please, move on to school property—the sidewalk in front of the school—or, even better, go to the cafeteria where breakfast is being served and you could just sit and relax until your first class begins. Don't forget to take your garbage with you.

Principal Valletta did this every morning for the first three or four weeks of school. There were many unexpected repercussions.

Especially during the first week of classes, many parents of the incoming ninth graders were surprised to see a high school principal outside the school and felt relieved that there was a person in authority who would see that their children were ushered into the school safely. She was also available to answer questions they had about the school.

During her patrol, Ms. Valletta would greet students as they entered, reminding them to have their ID cards out to show to the security agents. They could also speak with her on any issue. She would also greet staff members as they entered. Some felt she was there solely to see who was arriving late. This was not her purpose, but an unexpected consequence was improved staff punctuality.

Neighborhood residents saw the principal moving students away from their buildings. Some thanked her. Some said, "It's about time!" Many were surprised to see the principal doing such a "menial" task. However, calls from neighborhood residents dropped significantly once this practice began. There is nothing menial about teaching students to be good neighbors, encouraging students to get into school on time and not malingering on a comfortable stoop, and providing one-on-one access to students, parents, and staff.

The security assistant principal saw Ms. Valletta on patrol and joined her outside the school. After Ms. Valletta's three- to four-week tour of duty, he took over. By this time the message had been sent and the ground rules established. By being a role model, the principal defused many problems before they even happened and taught her assistant principal to be proactive.

On some occasions, problems will be caused by a school's own security staff. This can be labeled as "Dean's Syndrome." It is important that you understand this condition. The main task of the school security staff—school security officers (called school security agents in New York City), deans, and the assistant principal of security—is to keep the incorrigible students in the school under control. Yes, you're horrified by the term *incorrigible*, but it's better than *criminal element*, which would also be more or less correct. Let's be honest with ourselves. There are certain children whose sole purpose in attending any school (public, private, or parochial) is to disrupt it.

The causes of this are myriad: poverty, abuse, societal failure, parental incompetence, and, yes, the failure of the school. No public school in New York City and probably few schools anywhere in the United States have a sufficient budget. If they did, there would be dedicated social workers, guidance counselors, and specially trained teachers with small classes to address the needs of this small percentage of the school population.

This will not happen. It is simply cheaper for local governments to keep such children under control than to provide effective but costly programs to address their needs: that is, cheaper for the school system, but not for society as a whole. Once these children enter the adult world, they will cost society dearly.

Who are these children? In a typical inner-city school, they include the nineteen-year-old sophomore who has amassed two credits in three years; the super senior still thirty credits short of graduation; the children who major in “hallway”; the students with criminal records. Left to themselves, this small group, usually less than 2 percent of the population, will draw others to their coterie and eventually control the school. This problem is not unique to the inner city. Every teacher and administrator in any size school in any location can point to the students in the school who seem to always be in the middle of troublesome incidents.

This is where security staff comes in. They will not let these students loiter in the building. They ferret out hiding places, such as the nooks in the subbasement. They find the graffiti artists. They remove students who disrupt class, who threaten teachers and other students. The deans follow up with suspensions and parental meetings. Typically, day after day, the same students are in the dean’s office for one reason or another. When an incident happens, the perpetrator is invariably one of the usual suspects.

Are all such children always lost? No. In many schools, some become the dean’s monitors. The dean then speaks with them daily and often contacts their parents. They are given responsible tasks to complete under adult supervision. The dean periodically checks on their progress with their teachers.

Some of these students find a place in one of the school offices, being monitors for an assistant principal, where the same type of adult oversight is in place. Some may be placed in special school programs, designed to address their needs. Ms. Rivera, our suburban high school principal, had an Adopt-a-Student program in which a local business leader would take

students under his wing, work with them, and make them aware of what is needed for success in the real world. Other such students are referred to their guidance counselors who can often arrange for outside programs funded by the state, local, or federal government. Some “incorrigibles” are able to turn it around and graduate.

Some never do. In New York City, they join the roving group of students who are moved from one school to another every semester or so. The theory is that a change of venue may solve the problem. Most school systems with multiple schools try this strategy; smaller systems try changing classes and teachers. On rare occasions, this works. But, most wind up being moved to still another school or another teacher at the end of the next semester or year. Many such students drop out.

Over 90 percent of a school’s security staff’s time is spent dealing with 2 percent of the school population. This is the cause of Dean’s Syndrome. After spending most of your time with the incorrigibles, you can forget that the other 98 percent are good if sometimes mischievous children. When the security staff conducts a complete school sweep, they pick up the problems, but there will always be a few others caught in the net: a student who forgot to ask for the pass before leaving the room, the student who was talking with a teacher after the bell and was now heading to class late, the student returning from the health office where she was recovering from an asthma attack.

Sometimes, the deans forget that each child is an individual and treat all students alike, those with a history of issues and those who have never before even seen the dean’s office. As a result, upset parents contact the school leader to ask why they are being called to the school when their children are never in trouble.

As previously described, the school leader will promise to investigate. He will speak with the child and check the child’s records, her attendance, her grades, and the dean’s file. In many such cases, he will find that parent is right. The child happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and the parent doesn’t really need to come to the school. He will speak with such children and remind them that they should always have a hall pass while classes are in session.

The school leader will call the parents back and assure them that he has resolved the matter. He will also be honest: The dean’s job is to make sure that the few bad students do not prey on the many good students, such as

their own children. Sometimes, in doing so, an error is made. That's why the principal is available to correct such errors. But, despite such mistakes, it is important to keep the school safe for all children. Most parents will fully agree.

In the preceding paragraphs, you may have been taken aback by the use of judgmental language: *good, bad, nice, criminal, incorrigible*. We all know that such terms apply to the actions of the students, not to them as persons. However, let's also be honest with ourselves. In the real world this doesn't make a difference: People are judged by their actions. No matter how good a school or how good its staff, there will always be unsolvable problems. There will always be problem children who cannot be reached. The best the school can do is minimize the negative influence of these students. If the school does this, there will be fewer situations in need of defusing.

Another important strategy that leads to defusing and resolution is having ladders of response. Some may look at this negatively and call it layers of bureaucracy. Problems are best solved at the lowest level. If a student comes to the principal complaining that he received an unfair grade, the principal should ask if he has spoken to the teacher. If the answer is no, she should advise the student to do so. If the answer is yes, she will ask if he spoke to the assistant principal in charge of the subject area. If the answer is no, she will advise him to do so. If the answer is yes, the principal will look into the matter.

This illustrates the ladder of response. At the teacher level, there is no administrative interference and the teacher has the opportunity to review the grade and provide the student with an explanation. If the student still thinks the grade is unfair, he can appeal to the intermediate supervisor, who will also seek to resolve the matter.

Few teachers want to have a supervisor involved in such matters, and no principal has the time to resolve every issue that arises in a school. That's why there are assistant principals, deans, counselors, social workers, programmers, and so on. It is the task of each staff member to resolve issues at his or her level. Only the most problematic are referred to the next level. Of course this means that the problems that do come across the principal's desk are usually the most difficult to resolve.

There's another way to look at this. If all issues were immediately brought to the principal for resolution and the aggrieved party disagreed,

the only appeal would be to the superintendent. Problems that should have been resolved at the school level are now at the district level, something no principal wants.

So the ladders of response are sieves that resolve most matters before they reach the principal. As a school leader, you can evaluate the effectiveness of your staff by the problems you see. An assistant principal or department chair is the principal's first administrative buffer to issues regarding teachers—the first rung in the ladder of response. Ms. Niles-Perry, as a department chair in a Los Angeles grade 7–12 school, found that 90 percent of parent complaints involved two teachers in her department of twenty.

One was a poor teacher. At that time, the procedures for removing a tenured incompetent teacher involved a lengthy two- to three-year process involving mounds of paperwork and a myriad of hearings. When parents complained about this teacher, the assistant principal could truthfully reply that she was pursuing the course of action defined by district regulations. If the parent was not satisfied and went to the principal or superintendent, they would support what had been said.

The other teacher was anything but incompetent. He planned and executed lessons well. Student papers were carefully read and contained appropriate responses and corrections. There was never an issue with classroom management. But the teacher was too rigid. If he said that an assignment was to be done in a certain way, any deviation from the format led to a poor grade. If an oral presentation had to follow a format within a time frame, no creative changes were acceptable. Critiques were public and sometimes brutally honest.

Three years after the fact, when graduates came to visit the school, many would say that now that they were in college, they appreciated what they learned in Mr. Puce's class. He had taught them how to write, how to make oral presentations, and how to accept criticism. They didn't like him when they were in his class, but now they appreciated his uncompromising devotion to having students strive for excellence (Ms. Niles-Perry's paraphrase, not their exact words).

At first, when a student or parent complained about Mr. Puce, Ms. Niles-Perry transferred the student, putting the problem down to a personality conflict. This was a disservice to both the student and the teacher.

Then she began to explain to complaining students that Mr. Puce's class was one of the easiest to pass in the school: All they had to do was



follow the instructions they were given. Writing is one of the most difficult skills to learn, and Mr. Puce was the department expert in helping students improve their writing. Finally, she told students that in life they would have to work with bosses they may not like. In the real world, it is not so easy to change jobs when one needs an income.

Therefore, students needed to learn how to get along with those they may not like and to understand that the person in charge is not going to change for them—they had to learn how to change for him or her. Parents especially understood this last point. Over time, a class change was rarely made.

This department chair also tried to modify the teacher's classroom persona by working with him, more obliquely than directly, as he had many years of experience. Ms. Niles-Perry had informal chats with him about maintaining standards while at the same time providing criticism in a more palatable manner for emotionally sensitive adolescents. Mr. Puce came to understand that while oral presentations taught students a needed skill, some students are morbidly afraid of getting up in front of a group of their peers. Even some teachers, who stand in front of students day after day, have difficulty when asked to present to their colleagues. Mr. Puce made some allowances for students who said they could not make a presentation, permitting them to complete an alternate assignment.

Ms. Niles-Perry invited Mr. Puce to present at department conferences, explaining how he helped students improve their writing, and offered him the opportunity to have his classes take part in a special program involving a local acting company. An ensuing long-term relationship with the acting company led to changes in Mr. Puce's teaching style. There were still complaints, but they were less frequent.

Had this taken place in present-day New York City, the result may have been dramatically different. Here, the district enforces the "verbal abuse" regulation referred to earlier. In addition to prohibiting a teacher from using inappropriate language, it also defines verbal abuse as language that ridicules or embarrasses a child. Where does honest criticism end and embarrassment begin, especially when the interpretation is in the mind of the child?

The regulation is a good one, but it is open to abuse with competent but unpopular teachers who insist on maintaining standards. Mr. Puce could be one of these. The best teachers are usually the best-liked teachers, but not always. There are teachers who are just not that likeable but who are

hardworking and competent, and who teach their students valuable skills about their subject matter, about succeeding in the real world, and about learning to get along with all types of people.

A principal is a master teacher and needs to use this skill where appropriate. A principal needs to be proactive, not only with staff and parents, but with students as well. The transition years are always the most difficult: the transition from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, from high school to college. In general, students have the most difficulty adjusting in grade 6, grade 9, and the freshman year of college. Many do poorly, and this sometimes has a negative effect on the rest of their years in the school.

To address these problematic transitions in the middle and high school, the principal can be proactive and use her skills as a master teacher. Mr. Thelen tried to address this problem by teaching a lesson to all incoming ninth graders.

Every September, he visited all the ninth grade English classes. This visit had several purposes. Mr. Thelen wanted to introduce himself in a smaller group setting than the opening day auditorium presentation and wanted to explain how important it was to do well in the first year of high school. A mini-math lesson on GPA computation illustrated how a poor ninth year could negatively affect the college application process four years later. Finally, he explained who these ninth graders should go to when they needed help with different types of problems. The ladder of response was described in terms they could understand.

When students felt no one had or could help them, it was time to see the principal. They needed to understand that a principal is not as skilled as others in many areas. A principal is not a trained guidance counselor or social worker. Often, his job is to direct students to the person in the school who would be able to help them.

All school leaders enjoy such visits and interactions with their students. They are more than good public relations. They are preemptive defusing mechanisms, insuring that most problems are handled in-house.

We all know at least one school leader who believes it is healthy to engage in confrontational disagreements. Some of us may have even seen such disagreements escalate into shouting matches. Such school leaders

feel it is sometimes necessary to assert authority, especially to make an important point. They are wrong. Unless one is engaging in a heated discussion because of the assumed role one has to play (as a principal and a union representative at a grievance hearing), confrontations, even when followed by a hand shake or an assertion of “no hard feelings,” always lead to future repercussions.

Because we are all human, harsh words are rarely forgotten, particularly when they come from a person in authority. Once said, they cannot be taken back. Once said, they will forever color the relationship of those involved.

The downside of not exacerbating, which often means avoiding confrontations, was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: The school leader could be seen as a wimp avoiding sticky issues. As some of the examples in this chapter show, however, it is not so much avoiding issues as approaching them obliquely rather than head on.

Let’s look at how Mr. Thelen first became an interim acting assistant principal. Mr. Brown, the principal of the high school with the position, knowing he was going to need a department supervisor, asked his colleagues for recommendations. Ms. White, Mr. Thelen’s principal, gave him such a recommendation. Not being one to trust his colleagues (after all, she could be trying to solve a problem by dumping it in another school), Mr. Brown called an old friend on staff in Ms. White’s school. The report he received was that on the surface Mr. Thelen might seem to be easygoing—a pushover—but that he was tenacious and usually got what he wanted in the end. This is one way to describe the leadership style described in this chapter: Don’t exacerbate, but don’t accept and don’t give up either.

## *Chapter Three*

# **Speak Little; Listen a Lot**

English teachers learn that the best lessons require students to read, write, speak, and listen. A good English teacher tries to incorporate all four skills into each lesson. After several years of teaching, most English teachers will notice that they use many strategies to teach students how to read, write, and speak, but few on how to listen. There is a tendency to assume students know how to do this. Of course, this is a mistake. Teaching students how to listen—to a teacher, to peers, to the media—is as important as the other three skills and requires the use of definite teaching strategies.

When Mr. Thelen was a fledgling English teacher, a more experienced colleague, Ms. Henna, received administrative approval for an English elective in linguistics. She invited Mr. Thelen to teach a section of the course with her. A theme of the course was that miscommunication leads to misunderstanding which leads to confrontation. The importance of listening and understanding what others say was stressed. Both teachers learned to better incorporate teaching strategies for listening into instruction in all their classes.

A new chairperson or assistant principal will notice that many teachers lack this skill of listening. When he observes classes, he will see that teacher responses to student questions are often non sequiturs; the teacher has not really listened to nor understood the question. Sometimes teachers accept student responses that are inappropriate to the discussion. Again, they are not really listening to what the students say.

This school leader will find that he needs to teach listening skills to the teachers he supervises. It is important for them to listen carefully to what their students say, as some students, particularly those for whom English is

not their native language, have difficulty expressing themselves. In general, humanities teachers listen better than math or science teachers. The latter sometimes do not understand what their students are trying to say or ask and therefore are unaware when students don't understand a problem or concept.

Aside from instructional issues, the skill of listening takes on new dimensions for the school leader because it involves applying a teaching strategy to one's encounters with adults. The very best teachers use good motivations, ask thought-provoking questions, and provide interesting demonstrations. They elicit significant student response and do not dominate a lesson with their own voice. When these teachers become school leaders, they should do the same in their encounters not only with students but also with teachers, parents, and other members of the school community.

Chapter 2 describes how listening when an irate parent comes to see you is a method of defusing a situation. This may sound strange, but most people are surprised when someone really listens to them and, after listening, validates what they say by providing an appropriate response. Perhaps it is not so surprising. Haven't we all felt that no one listens when we complain about a telephone bill or call a technology support center? It seems that the corporate world has given up on teaching mid-level employees how to listen. Instead, they provide them with a script they must follow, regardless of the customer's question or problem. Employees are even monitored to be sure they do not deviate from this script. You usually will not get the answers you need until you get to the supervisor's supervisor.

The school leader provides validation to all who come to him with an issue by listening and, when appropriate, taking notes.

Often, students will come to the school leader with a problem. Like adults, they sometimes don't really say what they mean. The supervisor needs to look beneath the words they say. Let's look at an example. When Mr. Pfizer, middle school principal, was on his daily walkabout, he often found students in the stairwells during their lunch period. They usually were reading. He asked, "What are you doing here?" The most common response was, "I don't eat lunch" (even when they were munching on food they brought from home). He knew the students really meant that they didn't like eating in the lunchroom. He also knew the possible reasons: It's too noisy. I need to study. I don't have any friends to talk with during my assigned lunch period. I feel threatened by the crowd.

Mr. Pfizer understood this and knew it was the school's responsibility to provide alternatives. Most students liked being in the lunchroom, if not necessarily eating the food provided. In his school, good order was maintained by two assigned physical education teachers, one of whom combined a marine drill sergeant's voice and demeanor with the understanding of a mother or older sister. But, Mr. Pfizer also tried to provide places for those who wanted alternatives.

Students on the Principal's Advisory Council gave excellent suggestions and Mr. Pfizer listened. A computer room was made available to students during their lunch periods. This worked well until budget cuts made it impossible to pay for the supervision of the room. Students who wanted to read or study were released from the lunchroom to go to the library. And, the most popular alternative, students could become monitors in an office. There were many offices at the school, all capable of handling several students during each lunch period. These alternatives provided places for students who "didn't eat lunch" to eat lunch.

Not liking the lunchroom is a relatively minor issue. More serious ones come out of remarks such as "I want to be transferred out of this class," or "My teacher doesn't like me." These remarks sometimes translate into "I don't want to do all the work assigned in this class." In some cases, the school leader may find that the teacher is actually asking for too much work for the grade level of the class. In such a case, she needs to work with the teacher to assign the appropriate amount of work for the grade level. In other cases, "My teacher doesn't like me" translates into "I don't like the teacher's manner." An example of this is discussed in chapter 2.

Sometimes, the complaint means exactly what the student says: "I can't understand the teacher." In the not-so-distant past, when there were severe teaching shortages, departments of education recruited teachers from other countries. This makes sense if you need a native speaker to teach Spanish. It doesn't make sense when you need a math or science teacher and you recruit someone whose English is very poor or heavily accented.

Students who have difficulty understanding a subject like math to begin with just cannot deal with such a teacher. Yes, we are a multicultural society and we respect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all. However, students have a right to a teacher who speaks English correctly.

The New York City licensing exam that existed in the not-so-distant past tested that candidates were proficient in written and spoken English. Until an applicant could pass this test, he was a “substitute” filling a position until a licensed teacher could be found. It was relatively easy to remove such a teacher if his poor command of English interfered with student understanding. Unfortunately, today most certification exams only test for command of written English.

A school leader also needs to listen to her staff. This is one of the most difficult parts of the job. There are rarely enough hours in the day to do everything that needs to be done, so listening patiently to a staff member discuss issues the school leader has little or no control over can seem a waste of time. It isn't. The staff of a school sees its leaders as problem solvers, and of more than just school issues. Staff members will come to a supervisor for advice on everything from stock investments to parenting to marital problems. These staff members know it would be inappropriate for her to give advice (and she really shouldn't). They just want someone they respect to listen to them.

It will not take the new school leader long to realize that some staff members are lonely people. Even if they have significant others in their lives, they need someone to listen to them nonjudgmentally. The chairperson or principal needs to take the time to listen and be a sounding board. Sometimes, this school leader might refer them to others for help (school guidance counselors sometimes help staff members as well as students), but most of the time he will just listen and validate their feelings.

It will not be unusual for a staff member to end such a session by saying, “I'm glad I was able to talk with you today,” even though the school leader had just nodded his head and hummed periodically. Of course, the person was really saying, “Thank you for listening. I had no one else I felt I could talk to about this.” If the teacher leaves feeling better, the administrator's time was well spent, even if he was unable to finish that report or observe that class. The teacher will perform better because the leader was there for him. So much of what school leaders do is improving the ambience of the school and much of this is accomplished through listening.

Sometimes listening is not enough—and you may not know this until it is too late. Late one day, one of the most dedicated teachers in the school came to see Ms. Nguyen, an elementary school principal in

Houston. The teacher was smiling and seemed quite happy. She explained that she was feeling much better (she had been battling a serious illness) and that her doctors said she would be fine. She said that now that her energy was back, she would be doing better. Ms. Nguyen replied that she hadn't noticed any lack of energy or reduction of classroom effectiveness. Despite the illness, Ms. Nguyen had seen the same great teacher she had always seen.

The teacher continued in a very animated manner for a short time longer, then got up and left. She was her usual buoyant self in her class the next day, working hard with special needs children.

About six weeks later, the teacher committed suicide. The issues involved were not school related and went beyond her illness. However, to this day, Ms. Nguyen still has the feeling that she should have detected something, that had she listened with greater perception, she would have seen that the teacher's positive and animated manner was a mask for deeper problems, that she could have possibly gotten this teacher some help. Ms. Nguyen will never know.

On other occasions, being a good listener means allowing teachers to vent about vexing school issues, even if you have no control over them. Ms. Valletta, the principal of the vertical high school, had an elevator situation. The art deco elevators were installed during FDR's presidency and two or more of the six were often inoperable on any given day. The district had a contract with a repair company. The custodian and the elevator repairmen were on a first name basis because the latter were there almost every day.

The problem was simple: The infrastructure of the elevators was so old, no one made parts for them anymore. When something broke, it either had to be replaced by another old part or repaired by hand. The concept of interchangeable modular parts had not yet completely replaced craftsmanship in the elevator industry of the 1930s. There was a simple solution: completely replace the infrastructure of the six elevators with whole new systems. The cost, however, was prohibitive. So the cycle of breakdown, delay, and repair continued.

Periodically, teachers would come to Ms. Valletta's office to ask what she was doing about the "elevator situation." Available for their perusal were numerous letters to the district office requesting elevator replacement. Ms. Valletta listened to teacher complaints and validated their



feelings: “Yes, it is a bad situation. Yes, I understand that it detracts from the ambience of our school. Yes, I will continue to seek a permanent solution.” But, everyone knew these letters would probably lead to nothing. The teachers just needed to vent.

Venting is good, especially in such an emotionally charged profession as teaching where being able to let off steam about the little things can make dealing with the more important issues easier. Once a month, a New York City principal meets with the UFT (United Federation of Teachers union) Consultative Council to discuss matters relevant to the professional staff. The elected chapter leader may invite different members of his constituency to join him for this meeting.

Union representative Mr. Green always provided Mr. Thelen with an agenda of the meeting in advance so he could prepare to address certain issues. But the truth of the matter was that there were rarely any contractual issues to discuss because these professionals resolved such matters in one-on-one meetings. There were only “quality of life” issues to discuss. These included the lack of teacher parking spaces, the quality of food in the teacher cafeteria, and matters of courtesy.

Every school has a few teachers who could be classified as “malcontents.” Mr. Green made sure that almost all of these teachers in the school were on his Consultative Council. After the first meeting, Principal Thelen asked him why he chose these teachers when there were so many highly regarded professionals on staff. Mr. Green’s response was instructive: Having these more negative teachers meet and speak with the principal regularly would reduce the negative comments they made elsewhere.

This made sense to Mr. Thelen. Usually, the malcontents were the staff members he would avoid when walking around the building. By making them members of the council, Mr. Green gave them a way to communicate directly with the principal, venting in a controlled environment. Maybe this did improve the overall quality of life in the school.

Intermediate supervisors, called chairpersons or assistant principals in most school districts, also need to vent. These underpaid and underappreciated professionals are the middle managers of a school, carrying out the decisions of the principal. They turn the school’s vision and the principal’s ideas into realities. Ms. Niles-Perry, now a principal in Los

Angeles, had ten such chairpersons, most of whom were “subject area supervisors.” That is, they headed academic departments, handling all aspects of teacher supervision and administration for these departments. They also taught one or two classes in the subject area. Non-subject-area supervisors handled non-pedagogical aspects of the school such as school organization, guidance, and security.

In any school, there are several constituencies that interact with school administration, most notably the teachers’ union, the parents’ association, and, on the high and middle school levels, the student government. Each group is empowered to represent its constituency and each does so in a united way. It is important that school administration—the principal and her administrative/supervisory staff—empower themselves with such a united front.

This is not easy. Sometimes chairpersons, by the very nature of their duties, are in conflict with their peers. For example, the supervisor of guidance and the supervisor of security will approach school ambience from different points of view, sometimes in conflict, but both valid. Chairpersons of subject area departments all need part of the limited pie of monies for books, supplies, and equipment, never enough to meet all the legitimate needs of each department.

It is up to the principal to bring all these middle managers together as a team, to work to resolve any inherent conflicts, and to help all to see that they must look beyond their own departments and responsibilities to the needs of all the students and the entire school. It is up to the principal to see that once decisions are made, everyone in this group, regardless of personal opinion, publicly supports the decision as a united front. Will this always happen? Of course not. But, if it doesn’t happen too often, the credibility of the school administration will be severely impaired.

The bottom line for the school leader is to seek agreement, reduce conflict, and maintain credibility through a united front with her middle managers. This can be done formally and informally.

Let’s look at the formal first. Each month, Ms. Niles-Perry met with her cabinet, which included all her school supervisors and other key personnel, such as the union representation, the coordinator of the student organization, and the college advisor.

Early in Ms. Niles-Perry’s tenure as principal, some of these meetings were rather heated. It was not unusual for two or more chairpersons to

engage in a vocal disagreement over some issue; nor was it unusual for a chairperson to disagree with the principal. Less than one hour after the meeting ended, most teachers in the school knew who said what to whom. School leadership was seen as fragmented, disagreeing on major issues.

To prevent this, Ms. Niles-Perry established a new procedure. The principal and chairpersons would meet alone to reach consensus. This was called the “supervisory staff development” meeting and was held one week prior to cabinet meetings. Here, the principal and chairpersons would discuss the issues on the agenda for the next cabinet meeting. The ground rules were simple. Anyone could say what he or she wanted, no holds barred, but at the end of the discussion, when a decision was reached, everyone would support the decision. Whatever anyone had said at the meeting would not be discussed elsewhere.

It took time, but this meeting, held on Friday afternoons, became one all the supervisory staff looked forward to because it was the one time each month when they could take off the masks they wore and be themselves. They could share their frustrations. They could see that their colleagues, each with offices far from each other, faced the same problems. They could share their strategies for solving them.

The principal and her supervisory staff came to know each other as people and not just chairpersons of this or that department. It wasn’t long before they began ordering lunch so they could relax and talk about anything—children, planned vacations, new cars, home repairs—for the first hour or so. They came together as a team.

All had different ideas and opinions, but all realized that each was a professional committed to making the school a better place for students to learn and teachers to teach. Principal Niles-Perry said very little at most of these meetings, but she listened and then facilitated the team toward the final decision, which wasn’t always the one she envisioned before the meeting began.

One month, Mr. Coral, a legal expert from the district, came to run a workshop. He was surprised that the administrative staff treated him to lunch. After the meeting, he took Ms. Niles-Perry aside and said, “You all actually like each other!” Mr. Coral had been to over twenty schools, and for him to make such a remark made Ms. Niles-Perry wonder how other schools could function if the school leaders didn’t “like each other.”

The camaraderie of these meetings carried over to the creation of an annual holiday party at the principal's condo and to an annual end-of-school-year barbeque at one of the chairperson's homes. Now retired, they still all keep in touch and remember the good times they had. Someone will always remark how they had been "quite a team."

The longer you serve as a principal, the better you will be at building consensus. You will soon learn that decisions are made before the formal meeting even begins. When you plan a change in school policy or have a major decision to make, you should stop in to visit each chair or assistant principal and informally discuss the policy or decision. If you see there will be no consensus, put off the discussion until you can better build such consensus, one-on-one. As time goes on, you will know which people might object to something and be able to save time by concentrating your one-on-one efforts with them instead of everyone.

If you remain a school leader in the same school for most of your career, you will be able to emulate Ms. Niles-Perry. By the end of her tenure as principal, she was able to write the summary of any supervisory staff development or cabinet meeting before the meeting took place. The importance of the stability of the leadership staff in a school should not be underestimated, especially when most get along and put the needs of the school ahead of the individual needs of each department.

Competent school leaders have an even more informal way of listening to their administrative-supervisory staff by allowing them to vent. They have an unwritten policy that any assistant principal or chair can come to their office, shut the door (one of the few times it is shut), and basically let them have it. Sometimes, these leaders find that the complaint is right on target—they messed up and need to correct something and apologize. Sometimes, they find that the needs of the school are infringing on the needs of the assistant principal's department and he needs to vent. Sometimes, it may even be a disagreement with the principal's own leadership style.

Mr. Maroon, Ms. Hildebrand's head of guidance at the Chicago middle school, often came to speak with Ms. Hildebrand about her leadership style. He liked handling matters in a direct and more authoritarian manner than Ms. Hildebrand. He was impatient with her oblique, sometimes meandering, and usually patient methods. And he let his principal know it. Mr. Maroon didn't know this, but deep down they were in

basic agreement; however, to run a school in the modern world is to be a politician, with all this word implies.

Ms. Hildebrand's basic leadership belief (also the belief implicit in this book) is that slow and what may seem like plodding change works best because when change is gradual it is almost imperceptible and is therefore acceptable. Such change, while slow, becomes institutionalized far better than rapid change, which will often prove ephemeral. Bottom line: Mr. Maroon needed to vent, his principal listened, and they both felt better.

This chapter could have been titled, "Put Yourself in the Place of the Person Speaking to You." This has become a cliché of interpersonal relations, but it is true. You can refer back to all the previous examples and add this principle. Listen to the student, the parent, the teacher, the assistant principal as if he or she were you. Ask yourself then, what am I really saying? How do I feel? What do I want from my listener? By creating this empathy between yourself and the person speaking, you will be better able to defuse volatile situations.

The only real downside to this principle has to do with the perceptions of other people. It doesn't take long for a school leader to realize that different staff members have different visions of what a school leader should be and how a school leader should act. To read modern texts on school leadership, one would think that all staff members want a leader who shares leadership among all. Yes, some do. But, you will find that there are many excellent teachers who only want you to make it possible for them to have the best teaching conditions and want nothing to do with decision making. Some will flatly tell you that you are being paid the "big bucks" to make the decisions. They want you to seek their opinions, but they do not want leadership roles.

You will find that there are some teachers who don't even want you to seek their opinions. In general, they are the older professionals who are used to the authoritative leadership style of a different generation. Many who have been teaching a long time just want a principal to say what he wants so they can do it. Seeking opinions is just being wishy-washy.

Listening without strongly expressing an opinion can be seen as being weak and indecisive. Of course, if you are doing your job well, you've lined up your ducks and made sure that others are expressing your opinion for you so that you can give them the credit, which leads us into the next chapter.

## *Chapter Four*

# **Give the Credit; Take the Blame**

Let's begin with two basics. First, school leadership is not about earning personal accolades; it is about facilitating positive change to improve student achievement. Second, if people in an institution are part of this change process, they are more likely to support and implement the change.

Some school leaders relish the spotlight so much that sometimes the school becomes identified with its leader and seems not to exist independent of him. Often such school leaders are charismatic figures who accomplish dramatic changes in a short period of time. However, once they leave, the school loses focus and dynamism, and student achievement diminishes. Such a leader is a modern-day Alexander the Great—he conquers the world, but when he leaves, the empire of the school falls apart and he is fondly remembered as the leader during the school's "golden age."

Such a person is a failure. A successful school leader must institutionalize changes so that they continue to thrive long after he leaves the school. In general, the school leader who stays in the background, who builds a competent team, and who institutionalizes change will be the school leader who truly succeeds. For the well-trained staff and institutionalized procedures will continue long after this leader is gone and will ensure that any gains the school has made will not be lost.

Once the school leader decides that the success of the school is more important than his personal success, he can embrace this principle. How does one "give the credit"? That's easy. Whenever anything goes right, give the credit to all those who contributed to the success, however tangentially. Let's look at some examples.

The assistant principal of a particular grade or subject area initiated strategies that led to excellent statistics on the required state examination. She created a curriculum designed to help staff and students achieve this success. She worked with all newly assigned teachers to show them how they could prepare students for this exam. She focused her staff development of experienced teachers on strategies for improving student test-taking skills. She created department- or grade-wide assignments and exams that made students familiar with the format of the state exam. In other words, she did a massive amount of work to try to achieve the desired result.

When these results were achieved, instead of taking any credit herself, this assistant principal gave accolades to all her teachers for their fine work. Her work would have been useless if the teachers had not implemented all her strategies. When the principal asked her why her department did so well, she praised the work of her teachers and requested funding for a special congratulatory luncheon for them.

A week after Mr. Pfizer was appointed principal of his middle school, his superintendent requested a mission statement for the school, as none had been previously written. He had inherited a school with a Principal's Advisory Council composed of teachers, administrators, parents, and sixth grade students. He felt this would be the perfect committee to create such a statement.

This newly appointed principal naively thought this task would be easy, for surely all these people knew what the school was all about. After several sessions, it was obvious to Mr. Pfizer that the committee was going nowhere—everyone had ideas, but nothing was forming a cohesive whole. The superintendent expected a document before the end of the fall semester. Mr. Pfizer carefully reviewed all his notes on the meetings and, based on these, devised the “draft” of a mission statement. At least one idea from everyone on the committee was included somewhere in this draft.

At the next meeting, the committee looked at the draft and provided feedback. To Mr. Pfizer's amazement, all discussion was focused on relatively minor aspects of the draft. The main document was accepted almost as a *fait accompli*. After a few more meetings to complete these refinements (every meeting began with the distribution of the revised draft, incorporating the ideas of the previous meeting), his committee had a document that all accepted.

When it was sent to the superintendent, and subsequently included in the *Student Handbook*, in the *Teacher Handbook*, and on a poster in the school lobby, it included the following: “This Mission Statement was created in the fall of 20xx, a collaborative effort of [the names of all members of the committee, even those who rarely attended, were listed in alphabetical order].”

In addition to seeing the importance of “giving the credit,” Mr. Pfizer learned another invaluable lesson: It is virtually impossible to create something from nothing. You can save a great deal of time and effort by always beginning with a “draft” document.

Giving the credit also means giving thanks to all who contributed to an achievement. When you become principal, begin your opening day faculty meeting with a summary of the school statistics from the previous year. For every success, publicly thank the person, office, or department responsible. If the data of a particular department is poor, say nothing. Your silence will speak louder than words. You will find that in almost every case where a particular department received no accolade, that department will try harder the next year to improve to have its success publicly touted at the opening meeting.

“Take the blame” is actually the easier half of this principle. In just about every school district, if anything goes wrong, it’s automatically the fault of the school leader anyway. He may as well take the blame because he is going to be given it anyway. Oddly enough, those in authority over a school-based leader expect him to make excuses and point fingers, so they are totally disarmed when he says, “Yes, it was my fault,” and follows up with his plan to correct the situation. In Mr. Chen’s second year as a principal, he had to take the blame.

In the early 1990s, the assistant principal of organization of a comprehensive high school in Brooklyn spoke to Mr. Chen about a costly problem: unreturned textbooks. Texts in science, math, and social studies were (and still are) very costly. Even hardbound paperbacks used in English classes were costing more each year. As the allocation for textbooks in the early 1990s was about thirty-five dollars per child, almost all funds were being used to replenish stock rather than add new titles. This assistant principal had an idea to encourage students to return their books.



He had already generated a list of the students who owed books from the previous school year. In essence, he wanted to withhold transportation passes from students who owed books. Since the New York City Transit Authority honored old passes or just let students onto buses and subways during the first week of school, this did not seem to be a problem, as long as the school made sure all students had their passes by the Transit Authority's cutoff date.

When most students were issued their passes, book delinquents (as they were called then) were called to the dean's office, given a list of the books they owed, and told to return them. Because they owed books, there was an "administrative delay" in issuing their transportation passes. After a day or two, the plan was working well. Students were returning books they owed not only from the previous year, but from their entire time in the school. Some even tried to return overdue books from their local libraries.

Then Principal Chen got an irate call from the superintendent: "Chen! Are you withholding train passes from students who owe books?" After hemming and hawing, he feebly mumbled something about "administrative delays" but before he could finish, the superintendent said, "Don't give me any cock and bull stories. All students must have their passes by the end of the day." She hung up. Mr. Chen did as directed and learned never to attempt to make excuses.

The next semester, every teacher was given a list of students who owed books and told not to issue them any books for the semester until the student gave them a "Book Account Cleared" slip. As books were usually not distributed until one week into the semester, these book delinquents had sufficient time to clear their accounts. This was almost as effective as withholding transportation passes, and the school was able to reduce its yearly unreturned book problem significantly. (See also chapter 7 for other ways to encourage book return.)

This tale did not end here. Several years later, the *New York Post* sent reporters outside schools on the first day of school. As students left their buildings, the reporters asked them, "Where are your books?" The next day's headline screamed: "NYC Students Have No Books!" As usual, the district, instead of giving an explanation, caved in to the sensationalism and the word went out that every student in every school was to have a book by the end of the day.

One reason for unreturned books, at least on the high school level, was the significant number of program changes that took place early in the semester for a variety of reasons: summer school results, test results, human error or computer glitches. Mr. Chen's staff was adept at dealing with these issues so that one week into the semester, almost every child had the correct program. But, knowing that about 10 percent of the students would have changes during the first week, he withheld book distribution and made use of the uniform plans (see chapter 1). There was no loss of instruction—and no loss of books—when students changed classes.

Mr. Chen had learned his lesson from the transportation pass incident. All students had a book before they left school that day. His assistant principals went into the storerooms and found obsolete texts and gave each student one. (Heaven forbid one throws out a book, even if it is a science text from twenty years ago. A neighborhood watchdog would be sure to see a school disposing of books and report the school for wasting taxpayer money.)

He then projected ahead. Would he get a call in a day or two when he withheld new texts from students who had not returned texts from the previous semester? One of his assistant principals provided the obvious solution: The school was not withholding any books since the students already had books, albeit from last year. Just to be sure, this principal called the superintendent and ran this idea by her. She loved it—and informed other principals about this creative solution to the media-created problem. Of course, credit for the idea went to the assistant principal.

Let's move on to something completely different. For an assistant principal to earn tenure back in the 1990s—and still today in many school districts—he had to submit a large portfolio that included a myriad of documents to prove he had performed satisfactorily during his probationary period. In addition, the superintendent would visit the school and spend part of the day with the assistant principal. She would review the documentation and then she would accompany the assistant principal on visits to many of the teachers he supervised. Before entering the room, the superintendent would ask him what he expected to see in the classroom; after they left, she would ask for his evaluation of the instruction and, if appropriate, his plan for helping the teacher improve.

Part of a principal's job was to prepare the assistant principal for this process and the superintendent's visit. This was not always easy. Mr. Chen had a probationary assistant principal, Mr. Sienna, supervising a subject area. To prepare Mr. Sienna for this visit, Mr. Chen made sure the assistant principal's documents were in order (they were—Mr. Sienna was very good with paper) and then went with him on classroom visits, simulating what the superintendent would do. Everything went well.

On the day of the superintendent's visit, the documentation review went well, but the classroom visits were a disaster. Almost every time the superintendent made a suggestion, the assistant principal demurred, saying, basically, "I know this teacher and this school better than you, so I need not take your suggestions." Mr. Chen could see the steam starting to come out of the superintendent's ears, but never had the opportunity to speak to Mr. Sienna alone to clue him in.

At the end of the visit, the superintendent told Mr. Chen that under no circumstances would she grant tenure to Mr. Sienna (her language was far more colorful than this paraphrasing). As he knew that you never interrupt someone's anger, Mr. Chen just nodded his head and accompanied the superintendent out of the building.

Needless to say, Mr. Sienna was told in no uncertain terms that when the superintendent makes a suggestion, whether you agree with it or not, you say, "Yes, that's a great idea. I'll work on it." (In truth, all the superintendent's suggestions were right on target.) The assistant principal started to give excuses, but Mr. Chen cut him off and made it clear that Mr. Sienna's failure to gain tenure reflected negatively on the principal's own ability to provide him with the proper training.

It took Mr. Chen several months to convince the superintendent to give the assistant principal another chance. This involved making an apology, taking the blame for not providing Mr. Sienna with the proper training, and promising that this would be corrected. Every time Mr. Chen saw the superintendent at meetings, he casually brought up how the training program was going and how the assistant principal would do better if only given a second chance. The second chance was granted in late May and this time all went well.

In actuality, training had been amply provided from the start. Mr. Sienna never corrected Mr. Chen's suggestions during the initial walk-through because he accepted his principal's knowledge of the school and

its teachers. Who could have thought that he would not think the same of the superintendent? However, by taking the blame, the principal was able to obtain a second chance for this probationer and secure his loyalty for his entire time at the school.

Sometimes, you know you are going to take a hit and are prepared to take the blame. When Mr. Thelen first became assistant principal of the English Department at a large New York City academic-vocational high school, the school's passing percentage on the New York State Regents Examination hovered around 90 percent—but only about one-fourth of the students eligible to sit for this test actually did. Ninety out of one hundred passed, but three hundred other students were given the lower level, “local pass” Regents Competency Test (RCT). From attending district meetings, Mr. Thelen knew that in a few years this RCT was going to be phased out and all students would be required to pass the more difficult Regents Examination in order to graduate.

Rather than wait for the inevitable, he decided to be proactive and give all eligible students the Regents. The passing percentage plummeted to below 50 percent and the principal was, to say the least, unhappy with his new assistant principal's performance. Mr. Thelen expected this and took the blame while at the same time pointing out that about 180 students had passed the exam, double the number of the previous year. Mr. Thelen also promised that the passing percentage would rise each ensuing year as teachers became more adept at preparing all students for this higher level exam.

By the time the RCTs were phased out two years later, his department had a 70 percent Regents passing rate (about 280 students, or triple the number passing that it started with). Once the Regents became the only exam, there was a transition period where a grade between 55 and 64 percent was considered a “local diploma pass.” Because the department had created a curriculum to prepare all students for the Regents, it was able to achieve a 90 percent pass rate overall, with the Regents pass rate (a grade of 65 percent or higher) increasing with every testing.

The principal was quite happy when his school had some of the highest passing rates in the district and forgot his initial anger with Mr. Thelen. Credit for this success went to the teachers for the fine preparation they provided.

There is another lesson to be learned here: Future school leaders need to be adept in the interpretation and explanation of statistics. In today's world, blame and credit ride with test scores. Whenever your district has any workshops on data analysis, attend them.

Chapter 2 deals with defusing situations. One of the best ways to do this is to take the blame and apologize. A parent complains that a teacher was overly critical of her child? Take the blame—"I'm very sorry. I will work harder to train teachers to be more understanding of children"—and, then do as you promise. A teacher complains that she can never get supplies from her supervisor? Take the blame—"I'm sorry. I didn't set aside enough funding for this," or "In the future, I'll make sure supplies are on hand and that supervisors are directed to distribute them." The bottom line is that as the principal, the school building leader, everything that goes wrong is ultimately your fault. Let's explore saying you're sorry further.

Usually, when people come to the principal's office seeking a solution to a problem, the various parties involved want to blame someone for the problem—usually each other. How does a school leader handle these situations? There are three simple rules:

1. Never publicly assign blame to anyone else.
2. Always publicly take the blame yourself.
3. Don't be afraid to say, "I'm sorry."

Let's look at some situations.

- Mary, an honor student, cuts a physical education class to study for a test in her advanced placement class the next period. The dean finds Mary sitting on a staircase studying her notes, checks her program card, and sees she is cutting. This is a Cutting Sweep Day in which deans and assistant principals are constantly circulating around the school to pick up every cutter. Mary is caught in the net. She is brought to the dean's office, and her home number is called. Mary tells the dean that her mother is working, but she does not have the work number. The dean tells Mary she must stay in the office until a parent is reached. Mary, now sobbing, says she can't miss her examination in her advanced placement class. The dean, following the Cutting Sweep Day

procedures, will not hear her pleas. While the dean is busy with the next student, Mary sneaks out of the office and up to her room to take her test. Shortly thereafter, the dean realizes she is missing and sends security to the classroom to apprehend her. She is brought back to the dean's office, crying. Mary is put under house suspension until a parent comes to the school to meet with the dean. When the child explains this story to her parent that evening, the parent is furious. She comes to the school the next day, demanding to speak with the principal.

- Ms. Sniffle, a teacher with a very bad cold, has not slept well for several days. Being a dedicated professional, she comes to school to teach her classes. She is taking over-the-counter medicines and taking precautions not to spread her cold (e.g., using a hand disinfectant frequently and avoiding close contact with students or colleagues). However, Ms. Sniffle is not herself. During class, Michael repeatedly raises his hand to ask questions about material Ms. Sniffle has just clearly explained. The first few times, she patiently reviews the material again, asking other students to provide Michael with the explanation he requested. After about the fifth time, however, Ms. Sniffle has had it. She says to Michael, "What are you, stupid? This class doesn't have the time to keep going over what you should have listened to the first time. Now put your hand down, pay attention, and ask no more questions!" The next day, Michael's mother calls the assistant principal who supervises Ms. Sniffle and complains that this teacher had embarrassed the student in front of the entire class by calling him stupid.
- Mr. Gradgrind, assistant principal and supervisor of science, makes his first formal class observation of Ms. Newbody, a first-year teacher. He sees she is having some issues with classroom control and, being distracted, begins to provide the students with some incorrect information. Mr. Gradgrind stands up, asks Ms. Newbody to please sit down, and takes over the class, completing the lesson. Ms. Newbody is incensed. She goes to the union representative to complain that Mr. Gradgrind undercut her authority with this class. She and the union representative make an appointment to speak with the principal to file a grievance against the "unprofessional" actions of Mr. Gradgrind.

In each of the preceding scenarios, there is blame enough to go around. When the school leader meets with the parties, each will want his or her

“pound of flesh” in the resolution. Students, parents, and even the professionals in a school all seek to justify their words and actions by pointing fingers at others. What’s a school leader to do? Here are some ways she could handle the scenarios given above.

In the first scenario, after all parties have presented their viewpoints, the school leader would apologize publicly to all. It was her procedure for the Cutting Sweep Day that led to this problem. Her intention had been to make the school safer for all. She wanted to minimize wandering in the halls and maximize the number of students in class. She would explain that untoward incidents tend to happen when students are not where they are supposed to be, and this sweep was intended to prevent this. Unfortunately, as the deans and school supervisors pick up students who often cause problems for other students and staff, sometimes those with no dean’s records are caught in the net, as in this case.

She would go on to explain that since this was her fault, she will correct the problem—she will talk to Mary’s advanced placement teacher, explain the problem, and arrange for her to take a makeup test. If Mary has any future problem, she should come directly to the principal for help. The principal would give Mary’s mom her private telephone number so she can call her if she has any future concerns. At this point, the principal has solved the immediate problem. She took the heat off the dean who was just following her procedure. She gave the parent and student the apology they wanted. She made sure the student would not be penalized. She provided the student and parent with future direct access to her. She summarized all this on an index card for her parent/student problem file.

Now the principal can take the next step and explain to Mary that had she not cut class, none of this would have happened. She needs to study for her tests at home, not sitting on a staircase. The principal could speak to the parent about having a time and place for Mary to study at home—and the importance of the school having her work and cell phone number. She could talk to the dean about checking a child’s previous file when a student is caught in a sweep—and if there is no past record, dealing with the issue on a more individualized basis. Finally, she would initiate a program to obtain all parent work and cell phone numbers for the school files.

The second scenario, in today’s New York City Department of Education and possibly in other school districts, is far more serious. The parent

has made an allegation of verbal abuse against Ms. Sniffle. In New York City, as previously noted, this must be reported to a central agency with the power to investigate the matter and determine penalties—up to and including dismissal of the teacher. In most cases, as would almost certainly be the case with Ms. Sniffle, the principal would be directed to investigate and report back to the Verbal Abuse Unit. Given the legal implications of this, the assistant principal would not handle the matter—it would go to the principal. In other school systems with other regulations, this might not be the case. Let's see what the school leader would do if she were able to handle this matter herself.

Once again, she would apologize to the parent—a general apology, not a specific one that lays the blame on the teacher: “I am sorry your child was embarrassed. It is my job to train staff in how to respond to students, and I have not done this well enough. I will try to improve the training of my teachers so this does not happen again.” And of course, she would provide Mom with her private phone number. She would make herself available to Michael if he has any future problem. She would also add that Ms. Sniffle would be speaking directly to Michael to clear up the situation. In almost every case, the parent and student will be satisfied with this.

Then, the school leader would move on to the next step and ask Michael why he has difficulty in class. Does he have a problem hearing? Does he have difficulty understanding the instruction? Is this subject a problem for him? Would tutoring help? She would check Michael's records and speak to his counselor to determine if he has learning issues in other classes.

She would also speak privately with Ms. Sniffle. While the principal sympathizes with her and understands how she could lose her patience, using the word *stupid* in any context with a student is unprofessional and unacceptable. She would advise, in the strongest terms, that Ms. Sniffle apologize to Michael for using the word *stupid*. The principal understands that this will be very difficult for Ms. Sniffle to do, for she has found that teachers and even school leaders rarely feel they should apologize (even though these same staff members always feel students should apologize to them).

By being a role model in handling problems with students and parents, the school leader hopes to positively impact the attitude of staff members. In a district with a regulation on verbal abuse, she would have strong legal backing in this situation. The teacher, regardless of her personal feelings, would have no choice but to apologize. In another district without such a



regulation, the teacher would know that the matter could go to the district office if not resolved at the school level and this would be an incentive for her to do the right thing. In any district, if the student and parent are satisfied with the resolution and the teacher apologizes for an uncharacteristic and thoughtless remark, a further investigation by a higher authority would be avoided.

A typical school leader during his years as an assistant principal and principal will complete many hundreds of formal observation reports. On more than a few occasions, every school leader is tempted to do what Mr. Gradgrind did in the third scenario, but restrains himself. Taking over the class of a teacher, unless there is threat of physical harm to the teacher or a student, undercuts a teacher's authority with the students.

Therefore, when the principal meets with Ms. Newbody and the union representative, she would first apologize that Ms. Newbody was made to feel so upset. Instruction and the training of supervisory staff is her responsibility and somewhere she failed. Having heard this, Ms. Newbody would be far more likely to accept the principal's suggestion that all involved seek resolution outside of the grievance process. The principal would offer to meet with Ms. Newbody and Mr. Gradgrind so this matter could be resolved and future issues avoided. Such an offer is rarely refused because it saves everyone the considerable time involved in after-school meetings required by the grievance process.

Before they leave her office, the principal would ask Ms. Newbody about the lesson and what was happening in the classroom. She would also inquire if this was an isolated incident in her professional relationship with her supervisor (for the purpose of this scenario, let us say it was; if this were not the case, the matter would be far more serious and would probably lead to grievance as an issue of harassment).

Before the scheduled meeting for resolution, the principal would speak with Mr. Gradgrind and ask why he took over the class. While she would sympathize with his reasons (excuses), she would make it clear that unless the class was so out of control that he felt that a student or the teacher faced the possibility of injury, he should not have interfered with the teacher's instruction. Ms. Newbody was right. By taking over the class, he had undercut her authority. Any problems she was having with discipline would now only get worse.

Mr. Gradgrind could have inconspicuously signaled Ms. Newbody to speak with him, and he could have pointed out the error so she could correct it. Or, he could have waited until the post-observation conference and had her correct the mistake the next day. If he felt that she needed to actually see how to teach this topic, he could have offered to teach her next class (as a guest teacher who asked permission of Ms. Newbody to teach a topic he was an expert on) so she could observe him.

The bottom line is that when he met with the principal and Ms. Newbody, Mr. Gradgrind had to validate her feelings. He needed to apologize: "I'm sorry I handled the situation in this way. I promise not to do this again." And, once this was done, he could work with Ms. Newbody to help her improve her classroom management skills.

In all these situations, the school leader is implementing many of the ideas presented in chapters 2 and 3. By listening carefully, she is defusing situations by apologizing. She is resisting the temptation to place the blame on anyone other than herself. Of course, we are all human. In our own minds, we do assign blame.

A sensible rule of thumb is that the party to blame in any situation is the one whose words or actions initiated the problem. So, in the first scenario, Mary was clearly to blame: She should not have cut her class. In the second scenario, Ms. Sniffle was to blame for using the word *stupid* and admonishing Michael publicly. In the third scenario, Mr. Gradgrind was clearly at fault. Any supervisor knows that a new teacher will have issues with classroom management and will be very nervous when formally observed. In this last case especially, though, the principal would bear even greater blame, for she should have trained Mr. Gradgrind better so this incident would never have occurred.

As educators, we deal with words all the time. We teach classes where every student hears what we say in a slightly different way. Our facial expressions and actions are scrutinized and what may be a smile to one person could be a sneer or a leer to another. When we realize that a word or a look or an action may have been misinterpreted, we need to stop, apologize that *whatever* was not what we meant, and correct ourselves. This is common sense. Unfortunately, common sense is often in short order these days while egoism is rampant. To create a positive school

ambience, the school community has to see that school leaders take the blame, apologize, and say, “I’m sorry.” They have to understand that this is common courtesy and, in the end, prevents or solves a multitude of problems.

In the school building the bottom line is simple: Whatever goes wrong, for whatever reason, is the fault of the principal. Accept the blame. The only possible downside to this principle is the negative effect it may have on your ego. None of us wants to take the blame for others, and we all want credit for the work we do. But, in yet another contradiction, giving credit to others does not preclude your superiors giving credit to you. When a department or school runs well and provides evidence of fine student achievement, the principal or superintendent knows who is responsible and who deserves commendation.

It seems appropriate that we end this chapter with a short poem (with apologies to Rudyard Kipling):

If you can take the blame for all that happens  
When others point their fingers here and there;  
If you can give credit to all around you,  
While taking none without the slightest care;  
If you can say “I’m sorry” to all parties  
Defusing righteous anger everywhere,  
Yours is the School and everything that’s in it,  
And, you’ll be a school leader beyond compare!

## *Chapter Five*

# **People Are More Important than Paper**

This is probably the most difficult principle to follow. In an age when paper and reports are so important, it is easy for the school leader to fall into the paper trap, shutting the office door and concentrating on meeting the demands of everyone who wants another piece of paper or e-mail response.

Back in the early 1980s, most calls for reports and statistics came via snail mail. Because those mailing the requests knew that they had to allow for delivery and return, there was usually a two-week time frame for a response (but not always—sometimes the due date for a report had already passed by the time the letter had been received). By the 1990s, requests came by fax and the time frame for response was usually one or two days.

Mr. Chen, our Brooklyn principal, remembers a meeting with the superintendent where the principals complained about the number of items they had to respond to within a short time frame. The superintendent sympathized and said he would institute a new system. Those items he and his office staff urgently needed would be stamped *URGENT!* so that principals would know which items had to be addressed first. This worked for about two weeks; then just about every item spewed from the fax machine was stamped *URGENT!*

By the new millennium, the fax was being phased out in favor of the urgent e-mail. Given modern technology, perhaps this chapter might now be called “People Are More Important than Responding to E-mail.” The need to respond to requests, whether on paper or electronically, ties many a school leader to his or her desk/computer station/laptop.

The needs of people are always more important than the demands of paper, real or electronic. Being a school leader is a people job, regardless of the paper or e-mails that must be generated. In an ironic twist, the more one pays attention to the needs of people, the less real and electronic paper will be required. Conversely, making the needs of people secondary almost always results in problems that will generate even more documents.

Everyone wants a piece of the school leader, whether he is a chairperson, assistant principal, principal, or headmaster. At times, it seems he never has a moment to think as he juggles multiple people problems. The custodian is ignoring the plea of a teacher with a leak in her ceiling. The coordinator of student activities feels the school treasurer is tying his hands by the way she insists finances be handled. The students in Mr. Lime's seventh grade class are signing a petition because they feel his required forty-page social studies paper is too long. The director of the spring musical comedy presentation is up in arms because three teachers will not release students for the required rehearsals. The union representative wants to see the school leader about unprofessional activities expected of the secretarial staff. Parents are lining up outside the principal's door because the school was listed, along with seven hundred others, as having "asbestos issues." And the list goes on.

Yes, the school leader must put the finishing touches on the a report to the superintendent due next week, but each of these people issues has the potential to blow up in his face if he doesn't deal with them as they arise, so he acts as follows:

- He speaks with the custodian to find out why the water is leaking; if necessary, he arranges for another classroom for the teacher until the repair is made. If the repair is beyond the scope of the custodian's responsibility, he contacts the superintendent and central custodial office to ask that qualified plumbers be sent to the school as soon as possible. He is sure to indicate that student achievement in the affected classes will suffer and, if the problem is not addressed in a timely fashion, the Parent Association will become involved.
- He finds out that the new school treasurer is really following the district's regulations on the disbursement of money (regulations her predecessor apparently ignored—to his and the principal's peril) and so he

explains to the coordinator of student activities that regulations must be adhered to.

- The students in Mr. Lime's class are absolutely right. Mr. Lime is up to his old trick of scaring students into transferring out of his class to reduce his class size. The principal speaks to his immediate supervisor and advises that the department quickly devise a research paper policy that sets content and length of papers for each level of instruction. He reminds Mr. Lime that he will not approve any class transfers and can change the grades of any student he feels has been subjected to unreasonable expectations. The principal also informs Mr. Lime that he will be required to be present at any meetings with parents who complain about their children's workload in his classes.
- The school leader discovers that teachers are not releasing those students with poor attendance or failing grades and that they are upset that such students were even permitted to be in this year's show. He temporizes and intervenes to have the students released this year (it is too late to prepare other students to replace them) but promises to have the Academic Affairs Committee devise criteria for the future that will prevent this problem. By the next year, a new school policy makes it clear that participation in all school activities is a privilege and not a right and that such participation must be earned. For the annual musical in particular, strict academic criteria are applied, similar to those used for participation in varsity sports. (For more on the subject of participation in extracurricula activities, see chapter 8.)
- The principal finds out that the unprofessional activities expected of secretaries consist of making coffee and cleaning Mr. Coffee machines. He agrees with the union representative and sends a memo to all offices explicitly stating that this is not a secretary's responsibility.
- He meets with the parents and explains that the asbestos cited is in the floor tiles and can only be a problem if tiles are shredded. He shows them that the tiles around the school are very solid and explains that if any tile becomes cracked or chipped, it is replaced immediately by the custodial staff.

Another aspect of this principle involves the way in which school leaders communicate with teachers. Anyone who has ever seen a teacher's mailbox knows that everyone in the administration seems to want to add

another piece of paper to be read. If you stand by the mailboxes in the morning, you will see that most items are disposed of in the circular file. In our age of the computer, the e-mail inbox has partially replaced the mailbox, but this is even more divorced from person-to-person contact.

Good teachers know that ten minutes of time one-on-one with a student is worth ten lessons of full-class instruction. The same holds true for school leaders. Whenever feasible, it is better to speak with people one-on-one than to send a memo. The effective school leader will find that if he wants certain staff members to know something that he considers to be critical—or to implement some new methodology or new procedure—it is best to speak to as many affected staff members as possible face to face. This procedure is even more effective if the school leader visits the staff members in their own offices or rooms rather than having them report to his office. People are more receptive to information on their own turf.

Successful assistant principals and chairpersons often “make the rounds” to speak with as many members of their departments as possible on certain matters. Simply because the school leader takes the time to speak to each, the teachers intuitively know the matter is important. Of course, in this paper trail world, the school leader needs to follow up with a memo that succinctly summarizes the methodology or procedure or information, but this is secondary to the personal meeting.

Successful principals also make rounds. They frequently visit each assistant principal in his or her office. No matter how much paper the principal has on his desk, it is important for him to touch base with departmental leaders several times a week. He needs to know what their issues are and determine how he may best assist them. He needs to bounce ideas off them and gain their insights into existing and future policies and procedures.

These rounds need to include other key personnel on a less frequent basis: deans, admissions officers, programmers, coordinators of student activities, and so on. Sometimes, there will be no issues and these encounters will be to say hello or to catch up on one another’s families. Their main purpose is to communicate that each person is valued, as a person and a professional.

The examples given in chapter 3 are relevant here as well, for when you listen to people who come to see you, you are telling them that they are important, more important than the pile of papers on your desk.

Of course, while you value people, you must get your paperwork done. In all school districts, school leaders are evaluated on their management ability, defined as getting reports done correctly and on time. As a relatively new principal, Mr. Thelen remembers seeing a large chart in the office of the executive assistant to the superintendent. It was a grid with an alphabetical listing of all the schools in the superintendency printed down the first column on the left side. This was followed by over twenty columns, each with a short and almost unreadable heading. In each column, after each school was a green, yellow, or red dot. On closer inspection, it became obvious that this was a chart of reports due from the principals of each school over the course of the school year. The green dot meant the report was submitted on time; the yellow that it was late or in need of revision; the red that it was not yet received.

The executive assistant explained that too many reds and/or yellows were used as a basis for negative principal ratings. Therefore, it is appropriate to devote some space here to time-management techniques that will help you deal with the paper. People *are* more important than paper, but the paper must get done.

There have been many books written on time management. This chapter cannot hope to be as comprehensive as these, so in your spare time you may want to explore the business section of your local Barnes and Noble (or do a “time management” search on Amazon) to find appropriate reading. However, given that your time is limited, you may find the following suggestions will meet most of your needs.

## TIME-MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

### 1. Plan Each Semester, Week, and Day—and Then Be Flexible

Some school leaders seem surprised by everything: an e-mail from the superintendent requesting information, the union representative wanting to schedule the monthly meeting, representatives from the student government with a complaint, and so on. The events of the school year and week and day seem chaotic, and the list of tasks to do never-ending. Such school leaders usually have not planned, and therefore they become pawns of the seeming chaos that is a school rather than leaders who give order to chaos and control their own schedule.



A first-year principal will rarely know what is coming on any given day. An experienced administrative assistant (officially, a “secretary,” but this old title in no way describes her importance to the efficient operation of the principal’s office) will be a great help. The longer his secretary worked for his predecessor, the more she will be familiar with the format and due dates of reports and the procedures for the various issues that arise. Nevertheless, to be an effective school leader, this new principal must personally know what to expect and wean himself from reliance on another. He needs to take control of his day. Here are some ways in which he can do this.

First, at the end of each day, the new school leader should use a “plan sheet” to schedule his next day. Some items will go into specific school time slots (period 1, 2, 3, etc.) while others could be handled anytime during the school day. Figure 5.1 is such a plan sheet.

The period-specific column is used to schedule observations, post-observation conferences, meetings, and the daily walk around the school—this important task is easily left undone if the calendar is not cleared for it. The last column is used to list tasks that can be done at any time during the day, when he happens to be free. Many tasks are handled before and after the school day, when there will usually be fewer interruptions. There are sometimes evening events at the school, hence the final row. Figure 5.2 shows how the plan sheet might look on a given day.

A new school leader will learn early never to fill in more than half of the period-specific slots. This provides leeway to handle the unexpected, such as the irate parent or the sick teacher. The school leader will also

Period	Day:	Date:	During the Day
Pre			
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
Post			
Evening			

Figure 5.1. Blank Plan Sheet

Period	Day: Thursday	Date: 10/07	During the Day
Pre			
1	OBS Smith 402—Back up Jones 407		Plan for career fair
2			
3			
4	Post obs conf.		
5			Create agenda for cabinet meeting
6	Academic Affairs Committee		
7			
8	Walk about (see deans, admissions coor.)		
9			Work on comp educational plan
Post	Write obs report		
Evening	Parent Association meeting, 6:00–7:30		

**Figure 5.2. Sample Plan Sheet**

learn to have a backup for every planned observation, just in case the “primary” teacher is absent or conducting a type of lesson previously seen. The post-observation conference is penciled into a slot where the teacher has no assignment, to allow for quick and convenient feedback.

The timeliness of the items in the last column will vary. The Career Fair might be months away, so the school leader would only be looking at the early preliminaries at this point. The cabinet meeting might be the next Friday, so he would want the agenda printed and out by the next day. The Comprehensive Education Plan would be due in mid-May, so this would be a long-term project that at this stage would involve seeking the input of the School Leadership Team.

In his first year, the new school leader is often unaware of his long-term responsibilities. Let’s look at what a newly appointed principal might face when he first walks into his office in late August. He should find a weekly planning calendar on the desk. His secretary will have filled in some items for the fall semester, such as any meeting previously scheduled. As he completes his daily plan sheet at the end of each day, he will check this calendar to determine if some items are already scheduled. He will also begin to write in items as they occur and to use this calendar more and more in his own management scheme.

School years are cyclic. If there are monthly Parent Association (PA) meetings in 2011–2012, barring any changes in basic policy, there will be

monthly PA meetings in 2012–2013. The principal can take control of these PA meeting dates by having the dates for the next year approved at the last June PA officer meeting. Then, he can add these dates into the calendar—and two weeks before each, make a note to prepare and distribute the agenda.

Likewise, by preplanning in June, he can do the same for all required committee meetings: cabinet meetings, supervisory staff development meetings, Academic Affairs Committee meetings, monthly meetings with the union, School Leadership Team meetings, and so forth. The dates need not be reinvented each year, since the cycle of the school year does not change. If any committee met in the third week in September the past year, it probably should meet in the third week in September the next year.

By the end of his first full year as principal, near the end of June, this neophyte can take the previous school year's weekly planner and use it to schedule items for the next school year. As time goes on, he will add more items for the cyclic events of the school year: freshman orientation, the Career Fair, visits to ninth-year classes (and tenth-, eleventh-, and twelfth-year classes as well), School Sing dates, Multicultural Festival Day, and so on. By the beginning of his third year as a principal, the weekly planning calendar should provide him with a blueprint for the upcoming school year and nearly eliminate unpleasant surprises. He will have control of his daily, weekly, and yearly schedule.

The principal can use the weekly calendar to plan other aspects of his job. This calendar will tell him which weeks are the busiest and which the lightest. He can use this information to plan observations, required reports, evaluations of the supervisory staff, and so forth. Most principals find that May and June are very busy times. However, canny use of his calendar can help a principal deflect some of the tasks of these busy times to times earlier in the school year.

For example, Ms. Hildebrand's superintendent required principals to meet with their assistant principals in May and June so these principals could prepare and submit their final evaluations on them by the end of the school year. Careful calendar review told Ms. Hildebrand that she could complete most of this task in December and January, less busy times according to her calendar. She scheduled mid-year evaluation meetings with her assistant principals for this time. She had ample time to meet with each and create an interim evaluation on each. Then, in early May, she sent each a copy of this report and requested updates. With these incorpo-

rated, she had the final evaluations her superintendent requested, having done the bulk of the work during the December/January lull.

As she became more skilled and came to know each member of her supervisory staff better, Ms. Hildebrand refined this process even more. She sent each of her chairpersons a list of the items he or she needed to bring to the mid-year meeting. She had the previous year's evaluation on her computer screen when the assistant principal arrived for the meeting. Together, they updated the information based on the items the chair brought. She had a mid-year report printed and in the chairperson's hands at the end of the session.

During the 1990s, computer technology revolutionized the tasks of the school leader's job. A principal's skills along with his office software and hardware needed continual upgrading. For today's principals, such technology is second nature. They are already comfortable with word processing and spreadsheet programs and are able to adapt these to their needs. With the click of a mouse, they can bring up the previous year's school calendar (given to all teachers in September) and update it to create the current school calendar. Likewise, if they issue weekly bulletins, they can revise rather than rewrite them each week. The modern technologically advanced school leader will see many more ways to use technology to simplify his job.

All these calendars and planners need to be flexible. If there's an electrical fire in the school, the daily plan becomes meaningless, as the principal will be needed for totally unexpected chores that day. When students planned to leave Mr. Thelen's school to go to a Yankee victory parade (a very common problem in the 1990s in New York City), all his efforts were devoted to keeping high spirits under control—and keeping students in the school. On September 11, 2001, and for many weeks thereafter, the weekly and yearly planners of Ms. Valletta and all principals in lower Manhattan were irrelevant as new tasks never anticipated filled the days. The school leader learns that the key to success is to plan and plan and plan—and then to be flexible when the unanticipated happens.

## **2. Train the Administrative Assistant Well**

The principal's secretary trains him when he's first appointed. However, she will be using the parameters set by his predecessor. Over the course of his first year, the principal will need to set his own parameters.

First, the newly assigned school leader should have his secretary screen his mail. Mr. Thelen found that his predecessor wanted to see every piece of mail addressed to him. Much of what came in was junk mail, however, so Mr. Thelen directed his secretary to either dispose of it or, if she felt it may have some value, forward it to the appropriate staff member. He made it a practice never to receive any personal correspondence at the school so his secretary could open all his mail. When she felt an item was of prime importance, she attached a brightly colored sticky note to bring it to his attention.

Mr. Thelen also worked with his secretary for several weeks so she clearly understood what he felt was junk, what need to be forwarded, and what was important for him to see. Once this procedure was in place, his time spent reviewing his mail was dramatically reduced.

Today, principals have electronic mail. If permitted by the district, the principal should give his trained administrative assistant the ability to review this for him, deleting the dregs, responding to simple items, and forwarding appropriate items to other staff members. In this way, he only need deal with the important items that are left. The principal is the CEO of a school, and his administrative assistant should do what any corporate administrative assistant would do.

Second, the newly assigned school leader should review the common practices he inherits. Principal Nguyen found that it was common practice for her technologically challenged predecessor to dictate each lesson observation to the secretary, have her type it up, personally review and edit it, and then have his secretary type it up again. In addition to extending the time it took for the teacher to get the report, each observation required several hours of repetitive work.

Ms. Nguyen immediately discontinued this practice. With far less time and effort involved, she word processed, proofread, and corrected her own reports, freeing her secretary to take care of other tasks, such as handling school rentals, helping set up the Career Fair, creating the graduation program, and so on. A good administrative assistant should not be given menial tasks that a computer can do, but challenging tasks that, once trained, she can handle on her own.

Third, the new school leader should consider more efficient ways to accomplish simple tasks. For example, Ms. Valletta found that her secretary spent part of her early morning time in the mailroom putting materials in

the assistant principals' mailboxes. She installed mailboxes for them in her outer office, directly across from her secretary's desk. She or a student assistant could do this task without leaving the office. Ms. Valletta required her assistant principals to check these mailboxes each day, giving each an opportunity to informally drop in and discuss any matter with her.

Fourth, the principal must monitor all staff responsible for submitting reports to other offices. A new principal will receive e-mails or calls from the district office personnel whenever anyone on his staff is late with a report. This reflects poorly on his managerial skills. He should have his secretary keep an accordion file for both paper and electronic reports due. Whenever the secretary forwards a report to be completed to any staff member, she makes a copy and places it in the file under a date tab several days before the report is due. On that day, she calls the staff member and asks for a completed copy of the report and reminds him or her of the due date. Over time, all staff will become more cognizant of due dates and few items will be submitted late. A report-due calendar saved electronically will serve the same purpose.

Fifth, a good administrative assistant is the office Cerberus, guarding the principal from unwanted interruptions. Yes, his door will always be open, but his secretary will be on guard outside. Teaching an administrative assistant what cases truly should be seen by the principal is the most difficult task, as her natural tendency is to guard the time and privacy of the principal. Over time and with training, a secretary will develop excellent instincts. When a distraught student comes to see the principal, she will be able to judge whether the matter could be handled by an assistant principal or a guidance counselor or a dean rather than by him. She will sense when the principal would be the best person to handle the matter. The same will apply to parents and staff who come to the office every day.

As the office door will always be open, the school leader will be able to hear who is outside and what is being said. When necessary, he can "overrule" his protector and invite the visitor inside to see him.

### **3. Do Not Answer Every Phone Call/E-mail/Fax**

The tendency of a new school leader is to pick up the phone every time it rings, answer every e-mail as soon as it is received, or if she is in a system a little behind the times, respond to every fax as it comes in. Experience

will teach her not to respond to every request immediately. In any bureaucracy, today's urgent request becomes tomorrow's "please ignore this request." The report format sent today is revised tomorrow. The information requested now changes by next week. While reports are due on time, sometimes having a few days patience pays off.

Just as a secretary screens the school leader's mail, she will also screen her phone calls, both on the general school line and the principal's private line. Ms. Niles-Perry made sure her secretary knew that some calls were always put through immediately: those from the superintendent or one of her assistants, those from irate parents, and those from her husband or child. All others were screened. If her secretary was unsure whether to put a call through, she knocked on Ms. Niles-Perry's door and informed her that so and so was on the phone about such and such. If Ms. Niles-Perry did not want to take the call, her secretary gave the caller a plausible excuse, such as "She's observing classes. I'll take a message and have her call you," or "She's traveling around the school." When possible, she directed calls to other offices to handle, with the gentle admonition to the staff member that "the principal has asked you to take this call."

Today's gadfly is e-mail. Ms. Valletta dealt with this in several ways:

- She established a "private" e-mail address known only to her supervisors, the administrative staff, the Parent Association president, and her administrative assistant. If warranted, she added others. Any e-mails that come in to this account are important and have priority.
- She added an automatic response to all e-mails on her regular school address:

Thank you for your e-mail. I receive hundreds of e-mails each day, and it is impossible for me to respond to all of them. Most matters can be handled by the other professionals in the school. Therefore, for matters relating to —, please contact — at this e-mail address [she provided a list of the assistant principals, deans, etc.]. If this is a matter you feel only I can handle, please call me at [she provided the school number and her extension, not her private line].

In New York City, the chancellor has a staff to answer his e-mails; a principal does not have this luxury. Of course, a school leader can try to

read and respond to e-mails, but no principal can afford to spend her day sitting at a computer responding to e-mails, most of which are of little importance.

#### **4. Never Touch the Same Piece of Paper/E-mail Twice**

This is a standard admonition of all time-management books and seminars—and one of the most important. Every morning, the school leader should check his paper and electronic inboxes with their array of items (already sifted through and reduced by his secretary as described previously). Then the leader does the following:

- He redirects items that could be handled by other staff members.
- He immediately responds to anything that could be quickly handled.
- If any item requires information not in his “ready file” (see suggestion number 5), he asks his secretary to obtain the information and, once he reviews it, responds as soon as possible.

Sometimes, he might receive information about a long-term project, such as new instructions on how to complete the Comprehensive Education Plan. This would already be in progress and be put in the appropriate folder.

Sometimes, he might receive an item that requires a good deal of legwork, such as an e-mail informing him that the superintendent has approved a television news team’s visit to the school for a piece on “accommodation” issues or healthy lunches. This requires him to clear the flexible parts of the day’s schedule to handle everything needed to prepare properly: meetings with the security team, setting up classrooms to visit, getting parent waivers for appropriate students to be interviewed, and so on. All this has to be done, and the sooner the better.

The school leader must deal with all the paper, real and electronic. If he puts anything aside, he will only have to read it again, thereby using more of his most valuable commodity, time. By handling items as he gets them, even if this means adjusting his schedule, he saves time.

The school leader can better handle all the paper by arranging his desk and office to streamline his ability to respond and save time.

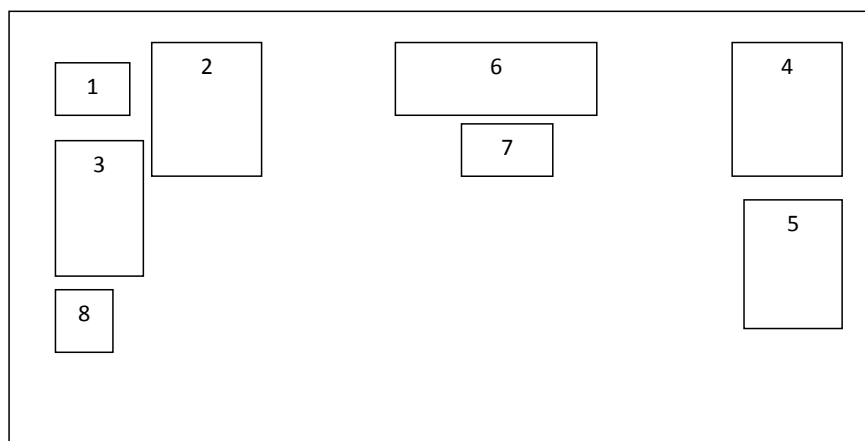


## 5. Use Your Desk and Office Arrangement to Improve Time Management

It is easy to simply use what one inherits. A new assistant principal or principal walks into her new office and just accepts the furniture arrangement and décor, sits at the desk, and begins working. This may perpetuate what may have been an inefficient system. Elsewhere, this book deals with personalizing the décor of the office and making the seating arrangements comfortable for visitors. This section is about making the office more conducive for time management.

Let's first look at the desk. A school leader needs a large desk. In addition to the work space in the middle, he will need several other distinct spaces. Each school leader will determine these according to his or her preference. Figure 5.3 provides one possible arrangement. Between all these items, there should be family photos, mementos, and school-related items to personalize the office space. The front middle section of the desk is the work space.

A principal will arrange these items according to her own personal taste. Her daily goal is to move as many items as possible from the inbox to the outbox. Items requiring more than a few minutes to respond to go into the "short-term" pile to be dealt with within a day or so. Items of a long-term



**Figure 5.3.** Possible Desk Arrangement (Key: 1. Metal box with index cards on problem students [see chapter 2]. 2. "Inbox." 3. Long-term project folders. 4. "Outbox." 5. Short-term project folders. 6. Weekly calendar book. 7. Daily plan sheet. 8 [optional]. Rolodex with contact numbers [not needed this if the principal has an e-directory in his computer].)

nature go into the long-term pile. Whenever there is time during the day, the principal has easy access to all current projects and may work on them as the time allows. In a similar manner, she may want to set up the folders on her computer screen so she can work on tasks whenever she has time.

CEO “power chairs” are inefficient (and send the wrong message to visitors). A simple swivel office chair makes it easy for the principal to access the computer station near her desk, her school and private telephones, and her file cabinet containing her “ready file.”

During Ms. Nguyen’s first year as a principal, different district and state offices asked for information, reports, and so on. Most could have been accessed electronically by the office, but it was easier to ask her. Ms. Nguyen located any item requested and then made a copy of it to add to her “ready file” for easy access the next time it was asked for. After about two years, it was rare that this ready file did not have a copy of any document that was asked for. Today, she has a “ready folder” saved as a computer icon, her one folder that contains those items she most often needs to access.

## **6. Plan for All Meetings**

If a school leader were to keep a list of all the different meetings he had to attend every year, he would wonder how he could find time to do anything else. Those required by the district or superintendent are nonnegotiable. However, the school leader can control the school meetings he must attend. Here are some simple suggestions for planning school meetings:

- Always have a time frame. Begin the meeting when it is scheduled to begin. Those who come late will quickly learn to arrive on time. End the meeting when it is scheduled to end. Limit the length of any meeting to ninety minutes, the maximum a meeting can be productive. Whenever possible schedule a meeting during a school period so the time limit is preset by the length of the period.
- Always have an agenda and stick to it. Save any new items or open discussion for the end of the meeting—and only if there is time.
- Always volunteer to chair the meeting and prepare the meeting summaries. This sounds like more work, but it really saves time. If the school leader chairs the meeting, she creates the agenda (with the input of the

others attending). If she writes the meeting summaries, she can keep them short and factual and avoid including details of any disagreements. This will avoid arguments when the summary is reviewed at the next meeting. By writing this summary as soon as possible after the meeting, when everything is fresh in her mind and her notes still make sense, the school leader will find the task to be relatively easy. See chapter 6 for further information on this.

- Piggyback meetings whenever possible. Here are several examples:
  - The old New York City Board of Education had a habit of adding new school meeting requirements without eliminating old ones. So, high school principals were required to have a principal's advisory meeting once a month with representatives from faculty, students, parents, and administration. The purpose was to have a venue to discuss school policies. Then principals were required to have an Academic Affairs Committee meeting once a month with representatives from faculty, students, parents, and administration. Its purpose was to determine policies regarding graduation awards, grading, and course accreditation. It also provided a venue to discuss school policies in general.

The savvy principal held one meeting to satisfy both requirements. He created two summaries, one for each meeting, so if these summaries were called for by the district, he would have them on hand. No one ever realized the summaries for two meetings, with the same people, held at the same time, were the same. The bureaucratic bean counters simply filed the reports.

- Meetings requiring parental attendance are often burdensome for the parents, all of whom are juggling their time between their jobs and their families. Each month the officers of the Parent Association had to attend a School Leadership Team meeting, a Parent Association officers meeting, and a Parent Association officers meeting with the principal. With the consent of the parents, this was all one meeting held ninety minutes before the monthly Parent Association general meeting, which the officers also had to attend. The parents who had volunteered their time to be officers, therefore, only had to come to school once a month. Once again, one meeting replaced many, although three separate summaries were kept on file.

## **7. Develop Techniques to Limit Individual Conferences**

Most of the school leader's formal conferences will be individual conferences with one to three people. If planned properly, time will be well managed and outcomes will be positive.

- Post-observation conferences with teachers will be part of many days. Time can be saved by doing the following:
  - Schedule the observation early in the day so a conference can be held later the same day.
  - Between the observation and the conference, word process the description of the lesson and/or make a list of the items to be discussed.
  - At the conference, elicit the teacher's self-evaluation. Check the list of items to be discussed to be sure all important aspects of the lesson have been covered.
  - Allow some time for "small talk" about school issues, recent books read, and so forth. Time getting to know the staff better is time well used.
- Conferences with parents and/or students will also be part of many days. Elsewhere this book provides suggestions for such meetings, such as allowing some time for venting, taking notes when the parent or student speaks, having a file box with index cards on "repeat" parents and students, and so on. All these techniques save time. In addition, if the school leader has a scheduled appointment with a parent or student, she should have the student records on hand (or ready to access on her computer). No time should be wasted looking for files at the time of the meeting.
- Principals will sometimes have to schedule grievance hearings with the union representative and the teacher bringing the grievance. In New York City, such hearings can be scheduled after the regular school day. Doing this, however, extends the school day for all involved. Some principals prefer this, feeling that after-school hearings in some way "punish" those bringing the grievance. In the end, however, such principals also inconvenience themselves, especially since an after-school

hearing is open-ended, lacking the framework of a class period. With the agreement of the parties involved, schedule such hearings during a mutually free period during the school day. This provides a forty- to sixty-minute limit to the hearing. When the parties involved in a meeting know it must end at a certain time, they tend to become task oriented and finish what needs to be done within the time allotted.

- There will be people, usually teachers, who just want to speak with the school leader. These people, whatever their issue or problem, are more important than paper and listening will improve their morale and their instruction. Such impromptu, informal meetings sometimes provide a school leader with insight into the teacher or information on the tenor of the school. Of course, the school leader needs to set some limits on such impromptu meetings:
  - From the start, indicate that there is only a certain amount of time, due to already scheduled observations, meetings, so on.
  - Use nonverbal signals to end the meeting, such as moving to the swivel chair in back of the desk to indicate there is work to be done.
  - A well-trained secretary will know to knock on the door to say that the superintendent is on the phone or indicate that there is a required meeting in another office.
- Finally, sometimes, very rarely, a principal has to shut her door to take care of a task that must be done. If she has an open-door policy and does everything mentioned above, her staff will respect her need for work time on these rare occasions.

## **8. Let Your People Fly**

A principal saves time by delegating and letting her staff members do their jobs, as described in the next chapter.

## *Chapter Six*

# **Let Your People Fly**

On a side wall in Ms. Valletta's office is a display of cartoons and sayings collected over several years. She wanted to project an image of someone who was not totally serious, someone who could see the humor inherent in her profession. A favorite saying, given special prominence on the wall, was "90 percent of the job of the manager is hiring the right people; the other 10 percent is letting them do what you hired them for."

This chapter is devoted to "letting them do what you hired them for." As an educational leader, you quickly learn that you cannot do everything yourself. The most important responsibility of the school, competent instruction, is carried out by your teachers, not you. Some principals try to do everything. Such educational leaders log impressive work hours, from early in the morning to late into the evening. They become micromanagers, checking, revising, and improving everyone else's work to ensure that everything comes out perfect. If this is your style, you are welcome to it. It may work for you and may help support the delusion that if you control everything nothing will ever go wrong.

School leaders need to learn not to micromanage and to be satisfied with the less-than-perfect. They need to trust those who work under their supervision, until such time as someone demonstrates to them that he or she cannot be trusted to do a job right. Leaders take a risk in doing this, but it is worth it. They want their staff to feel that they trust them as professionals and that their work is valued.

There are, of course, some limitations to this. For example, school leaders will want to personally compose the summaries of all meetings they attend. They learn that this is one task they can rarely leave to anyone else.

If a school leader allows others to write meeting minutes, he will run into two problems. First, some people will write detailed minutes, indicating who said what to whom and what the response was. When these minutes are read at the next meeting, disagreements that had been forgotten appear anew in print. Participants will often disagree about what they had actually said. There will be less time for new business as the meeting becomes bogged down with disagreements about what happened at the previous meeting.

Second, some people are just poor note takers so that what they write will disagree significantly from what had actually occurred. To set things straight, the school leader will either have to rewrite everything (telling the recorder that her work was unacceptable) or devote significant time to meeting one-on-one with the person to revise her work together so that feelings are not hurt.

To avoid these issues, always volunteer to write meeting summaries. You are already a good observer of classroom instruction, capable of using your notes to document the details of a lesson and write an observation report. You can apply these skills to taking notes at meetings. To prevent disagreements, write a simple and direct summary rather than minutes and avoid indicating what different people said: We discussed (whatever topic or issue); we agreed on (whatever was decided); we tabled the issue (until whenever). At the next meeting, the review of the summary should be quickly completed so that new topics can be discussed.

More often the school leader will delegate other tasks, as Mr. Chen did with his Brooklyn school's program chairperson. The program chair devised the class schedule for each semester and worked with each department chair to ensure the classes offered (based on student needs) meshed with the teacher assignment slots available in each department. Mr. Chen and the program chair met midway through each semester. The principal provided the program chair with the projected budget, the number of staff that would be assigned to each department, and the priorities for the school (often, the latter reflected the discussions of the School Leadership Team). The program chair was then free to create a schedule based on this information. He would then present his program to the department chairs. If anyone needed a tweak for his or her department or had a special request previously approved by Mr. Chen, the program chair made the adjustment. Over time, the program chair developed a basic master plan that he used year after year with only minor adjustments.

One caution: Some staff members in administrative or semi-administrative roles sometimes like to use or abuse their power. The old saying that power corrupts is true. For example the program chair previously alluded to had staff members he liked and a few he didn't. Thinking that his school's new principal did not know the intricacies of school programming, he created classes and time slots designed to help or hinder those he liked and those he disliked, respectively. After Mr. Chen reviewed the first program and confronted the program chair with these anomalies, he did not try this again. Chapter 7 describes how important a program is to a teacher. A school leader needs to understand how programs are created and make sure those entrusted with the task know that he knows.

Such delegation also applies to each department chair or assistant principal. Principals use formal and informal meetings with them to reach agreement on what they need to do within their own departments. As long as the students continue to achieve—and in most school districts, this means do well on standardized examinations—a principal will not look over their shoulders and interfere. This trust in a staff's ability is also extended to others in key positions, such as the deans, admissions officer, counselors, and so forth.

Will a principal ever get into trouble because he delegates? Of course he will. The most interesting example involves an administrative assistant principal of Manhattan High School and the rental of school facilities to an outside organization.

You'll need some background information to understand this anecdote. Following detailed district regulations, school space at Manhattan High School could be rented to outside organizations on weekends and after school, as long as such rentals did not take facilities needed by the school for student programs and activities. The fees charged for such rentals were very low and basically paid for the time the custodial staff had to devote to cleaning up the space after the rental.

While the school gained nothing financially, such rentals provided other benefits. The custodial staff liked the "overtime." They were paid to be present the entire time of the rental, say from five to eight in the evening, plus one additional hour for cleanup. However, once they opened the door to the rooms being rented, they rarely did anything until they had to clean up during the last hour. Often, they used the time to do extra tasks around the school, such as minor repairs or even painting a room or office.



The space renters, knowing they had a great deal, could also be generous. Manhattan High School's gym was rented to an organization that sponsored basketball and volleyball leagues among yuppie office workers. They often purchased athletic equipment (volleyballs, nets, basketballs) for their leagues, which, of course, the school could use. This included an electronic score board for the gym. In addition, they funded some graduation awards in physical education.

Finally, renters had to pay for security while they were in the building. The district paid for security personnel to be in the school building from about seven in the morning until five in the afternoon. After five, the school would have to pay for overtime security out of its own budget. As several school activities, including club meetings, tutorials, and athletic practices and competitions, took place after five, this could add up to a significant piece of the budget. However, as there were space rentals Monday through Thursday, the outside renters were paying for all security costs from five to nine. The only day the school had to pay security costs was on Fridays or weekends if there were any meetings or special events scheduled.

Principal Valletta delegated rental approvals to an assistant principal, Ms. Mauve. It was her job to ensure that such rentals did not interfere with school activities and that the rentals were allowed under district regulations. At that time, one taboo was the rental of space for religious purposes. There was some hairsplitting in this regulation. You could rent space to a religious organization for a meeting, provided it was an open forum from which no one was excluded; however, you could not rent to the same organization if it was going to use the space for any type of religious ceremony or rite.

When Ms. Valletta came to sign off on the form the assistant principal forwarded, she saw there was a religious organization involved and asked Ms. Mauve if she had checked that the purpose of the rental was an open forum. Ms. Mauve confirmed that she had informed the renter about the regulations and was assured the rental was for a meeting or forum, not a ceremony or rite.

Principal Valletta approved the rental, as did the superintendent's designee when the form was forwarded to him. It later came to light that the group was actually conducting religious rites. The assistant principal was temporarily removed from the school. Ms. Valletta received a verbal rep-

rimand from the superintendent and was expecting to receive an official written one.

While awaiting this reprimand, Ms. Valletta became proactive, establishing new procedures for all rentals. These would now be handled out of her office. Her secretary would serve as contact person and review the rentals. She and her secretary prepared new rental documents, including a school-required sign-off sheet in which the representative of the renting organization signed that they were made aware of all the regulations, fees, and so forth. Sometimes, as in the anecdote related later, Ms. Valletta was ordered to accept a group by a district administrator. In this case, any violation of regulations would be the district's responsibility, not the school's.

Ms. Valletta was ready to respond to the expected reprimand with a plan to ensure there would be no future problems. By a strange twist of fate, the expected letter never came.

Ms. Mauve, the assistant principal who had been removed from the school, was assigned to the superintendent's office pending the outcome of a disciplinary hearing. Rather than let her sit in the office doing nothing and knowing that she had an excellent reputation as an administrator, the superintendent's assistant gave her a job: reviewing all the rental agreements coming in from the entire superintendency to prevent the superintendent from signing off on any other questionable rentals.

This was letting a bull loose in the china closet. As part of her job, Ms. Mauve had access to the records of all other rentals in the superintendency. She found many other schools that had rented to the same organization that had put her in the hot seat. When her hearing came, all charges were tossed and she was returned to the school. (About two years later, the regulation was changed to allow religious rites as long as they took place outside of school hours.) After Ms. Mauve was returned to the school, she resumed those previous duties that she had performed well, but not the handling of school rentals.

Admittedly, the next anecdote is a little off the topic of letting people do their job. However it serves as a follow-up on the space rental story and also illustrates that while a school must follow every regulation to the letter, those who write the regulations often ignore them.

One of the renters of school space was the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the New York City teachers' union. At the time, their offices were a few blocks from the school, so it was convenient for them to rent

the auditorium for their monthly delegate assembly meetings. Under the new rental procedures, this was all done through the principal's secretary at the beginning of the school year, reserving the space for one meeting per month.

In October of an election year, a teacher showed Ms. Valletta the agenda for the next week's delegate assembly meeting. Scheduled to speak was the Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate, the wife of a former president. The chancellor's regulations expressly forbid the rental of any school space for political reasons.

Ms. Valletta called the UFT liaison and explained this auditorium rental was cancelled because school space was going to be used for political purposes; she informed the superintendent of this. It should be noted that the mayor of New York City at the time was a Republican.

Shortly after her call to the UFT liaison, the principal received a call from the public relations department of the chancellor's office saying that, as per the chancellor himself, the rental was to be permitted. The chancellor had been assured by the UFT that the candidate was coming to speak to its delegate assembly as a parent concerned about education, not as a political candidate. Ms. Valletta was no neophyte. She had her secretary pick up the extension and had the chancellor's representative give his name and repeat his message as she copied everything down. This information was immediately faxed to the superintendent.

The UFT meeting was a grand old political rally, with buttons, straw hats, and flags all over the place. There were no repercussions for the principal.

A corollary to letting people do their jobs is the old adage "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." In an age where we are trying to homogenize education and instruction, this is difficult to do. Mr. Chen served as assistant principal and principal in his Brooklyn high school for over twenty years. After so long a time, he knew the strengths and weaknesses of every staff member. He knew who would teacher-dominate a lesson, who would have a wonderful peer-mediated lesson, who would differentiate instruction, who would make cutting-edge use of technology. Like any principal, Mr. Chen knew he was supposed to always look for student-centered instruction, but, to be honest he did not. He had learned as a teacher that no one method of instruction is appropriate for every class or every topic.

When he began teaching in the early 1970s, the district's instructional method was the developmental lesson. Briefly stated, the lesson began with a motivating discussion that sought to relate the students' own lives and experiences to the lesson that would take place. Then, the lesson would develop through a series of pivotal questions. During this development, the aim would be elicited and written on the board. About halfway through the lesson, there would be a medial summary. At the end of the lesson, the final question would elicit a summary of the main ideas from the students. This was the *sine qua non* method and anything else would be considered "unsatisfactory."

Mr. Chen was proficient with the developmental lesson. One day, however, as he was in the midst of the motivating discussion, one student raised his hand and said, "Can we cut to the chase and get to the lesson? I'm bored by all these discussions. Let's just get to what we need to know." There were knowing nods by many students.

Once he had tenure, Mr. Chen strayed from the developmental lesson and used what was then called small-group instruction and even individualized (now called differentiated) instruction. He even used the taboo lecture method after graduates he previously taught visited the school and told him that no one had prepared them for the lectures all their professors were giving them in college.

On any given day, Mr. Chen might use a different method for the same basic lesson in different classes. Some class personalities thrived with small-group work, while others just couldn't handle this student-oriented method. Sometimes, different topics worked better with different methods. Instead of using one method of instruction, he expanded his repertoire to vary instructional techniques with students.

A school leader will see different methods used in the classes he observes. When his professional expertise tells him that the method used does not match the topic or class personality, he will discuss alternatives with the teacher. Otherwise, he will accept the teacher's expertise and knowledge of his students. Yes, some lessons he sees will be teacher dominant and lecture, but if the lectures are well prepared and interesting, then the instruction is legitimate. Some teachers may eschew whole-class instruction in favor of one-on-one time with students; if all students are engaged as the teacher works one-on-one with students, then this is fine. The school leader may even find some old-timers deftly using the

developmental lesson. Great! The students are not seeing this in every class, so it may be working very well.

As long as the lesson is effective, as long as the students are engaged, as long as learning is taking place, does it really matter what method a teacher uses? In fact, when students are exposed to different methods of instruction their school day becomes more varied and interesting. They are also better prepared for the less-student-oriented type of instruction they will experience in college.

Superintendent Clemens visited Mr. Chen's school for his yearly visit and together, they toured the school and looked into several classes. After he spent about ten minutes in one social studies class, the superintendent noted, "The teacher is lecturing. There is no student-oriented instruction in this class." Mr. Chen's response was that this teacher's students had a 90 percent passing rate on the required state examination. Mr. Clemens thought a second and then said, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Putting the right people in charge of the right activities makes it easier to let them fly. Ms. Niles-Perry's publication advisor at her Los Angeles school was Ms. Violet. Ms. Violet worked with the students who produced both the school newspaper and the school literary magazine. Because she knew instinctively how to work with students, there were never any issues about anything that was published. She was the right person for these activities and so was always free to fly. The importance of having good publications advisors is further explored in chapter 10.

Mr. Thelen's training as a teacher at a large inner-city high school taught him a great deal about freeing professionals to do what they were hired to do. In 1971, this school was one of the largest high schools in the country, with nearly seven thousand students. Most were on a back-to-back session in the main building; the incoming ninth-year students were housed in the Annex three-quarters of a mile away, on a site that today is part of Lincoln Center.

Principal White spent over forty years at the helm of this school. She and her supervisory staff tried to hire talented teachers and then allow them to use their creativity. Mr. Thelen remembers several occasions when he asked Ms. White if he could try a certain method or topic and she would always respond with "Go ahead. Give it a try. Let me know how it goes."

One time, he and several other colleagues who were teaching *Macbeth* asked if they could arrange for an after-school (for the juniors, after school on a back-to-back session was 12:30) showing of a movie version of *Macbeth*. Ms. White thought it a great idea and said she would drop in to see part of the movie. Pressed for time, these teachers handled all the arrangements, but never thought to preview the movie. Mr. Thelen and his colleagues were in a state of shock as the students watched the Roman Polanski *Macbeth*. The students were unaffected by the blood and gore (tame by today's standards); then Principal White walked into the room just in time for Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene—done in the nude by Francesca Annis.

Mr. Thelen expected the worst, but since there were no student or parent complaints that he learned about, the only feedback he and his colleagues received from their principal was that it was great to organize such events for students—but remember to preview any films in the future.

Anyone who has ever taken students on a school trip knows how difficult this can be. Any principal, whether in New York City or rural Kansas, knows that whenever he signs permission for students to go on a school trip, he is entrusting the staff member organizing the trip with his job.

New York City teachers planning a school trip must abide by multiple rules, all explained and delineated in the district's regulations: correct completion of the standard permission slip, obtaining parental consents, obtaining consent from teachers for students to miss class (for educational trips during the regular school day), and providing for the required number of adult chaperones. Every principal in every community will make sure that every district regulation is followed to the letter. Every principal knows that, despite this, if something goes wrong, he will be given the blame.

Many years ago, students from a school in New York City went on a trip to Great Adventure amusement park in nearby New Jersey. There was major fire in one of the attractions. Tragically, several of the students died. After the fact, questions arose as to why students even went to an amusement park during school time, what type of safety and insurance guarantees the school had required, and so forth. All the requirements and rules were stiffened considerably. Officially, the district still encouraged school trips, telling parents that the city, with all its museums, parks, theaters, and other cultural venues, was the classroom.

Unofficially, the bureaucrats knew that anytime students left a school, anything could happen, and so they made the clerical aspect of getting permission for a trip onerous.

All New York City principals are aware of the dangers of school trips, but as educators, they are also aware that it is the responsibility of their schools to expand the horizons of their students. Those outside of New York may assume the students in its schools are urbane. They are not. Most know little about the city outside the confines of their immediate neighborhoods. Their experience traveling the subway is usually limited to the route taken to and from school.

Mr. Chen knew all this when Drama Club advisor Ms. Rouge asked for blanket permission for her students to attend Broadway and off-Broadway shows on a regular basis. As Ms. Rouge was an experienced teacher who worked well with students, there was no question about giving permission. Likewise, trips to the Metropolitan Museum, the Joyce Dance Company, the Museum of Natural History, and other venues all had his enthusiastic endorsement. However, the dangers of more long-distance trips were made very real to Principal Chen through two incidents.

It is a tradition in almost all middle and high schools that graduates go on a memorable trip to celebrate their upcoming graduation. At Principal Chen's Brooklyn high school, seniors traditionally took a trip to Orlando. This occurred during the mid-winter recess (presidents' week), so no class time was missed. Because the cost could be a hardship for many families, students and their parents saved for months prior to the event. To reduce costs, the students went by bus, not airplane. The different coordinators of student activities (COSAs) who ran the trip were all very competent and always managed to convince many staff members to chaperone (that is, get little or no sleep for several days). Except for one year, all went without incident.

That year the COSA called Mr. Chen at home to inform him that one young lady was missing. She went to Orlando on the bus, she was with the students for three days, but today she had not returned to the bus or to the hotel. The COSA was attempting to contact the parents, using the numbers provided on the permission form, but had so far been unsuccessful. What should she do? The principal directed her to speak with any students who were her friends and to keep trying the parents' numbers and then call back within a few minutes. If the girl was not located nor

her parents contacted, Mr. Chen would have to call the superintendent and law enforcement would have to be involved.

About thirty minutes later, a relieved but very angry COSA called. The student's friends knew she had left. She had told them that she had a professional acting job on the West Coast, and she had gone to the airport to catch her flight. The COSA added that she had reached the girl's mother, who, indeed, knew and approved of all of this. Subsequently, Mr. Chen had a long conversation with this mother. The rest of the school trip was without incident. The once missing girl safely flew back home to her family from her West Coast job. The student's guidance counselor spoke with her and her mom.

The other incident involved a trip of special needs students to a park on Staten Island. This was on school time and was considered an educational trip to learn about nature. The three teacher chaperones were experienced teachers. At about 4:00 p.m., Mr. Chen received a call from an angry superintendent. She had just received a call from a policeman on Staten Island. It seems that two students on this trip had been left alone in the park. These two special needs students found a pay telephone and called 911 to report that their bus had left without them. They were now in the police station.

Fortunately, the assistant principal of special education was still in the school. Upon hearing about this, she called the precinct and said she was on her way to personally pick up the children. She called the parents to say there had been a mix-up and she would make sure their children were brought home. She drove to Staten Island, picked up the children, and brought them home. Needless to say there was significant follow-up with the parents, children, and, most of all, the teachers. In the end, the children were safe, but Mr. Chen was left to imagine what could have happened.

As principal, Mr. Chen approved hundreds of trips during his many years as a principal. These were the only two incidents where the welfare of children was at issue. In both cases, the children were safe. The teachers were free to provide children with expanded horizons, but after each of these incidents, what could have happened made him wonder if it was worth the risk to the welfare of children (and to his own position) to allow trips. This questioning only lasted a few hours. As you will learn as a principal, you have to continue to trust your staff and permit students to experience the world outside of the classroom.



When letting people fly, always remember, in the end, you are responsible for what they do or do not do. Be prepared to “take the blame.” There will always be someone who burns you and this will tempt you to pull back the reins and become a micromanager. Don’t. To do so is to tell others that you mistrust their professionalism. Better to get in hot water once in a while than to lose the trust and support of your staff.

## *Chapter Seven*

# **Be Aware of Workplace Issues**

Teachers legitimately complain that it doesn't take long for a school leader to forget what it was like to be a teacher with a full program. As one climbs up the administrative ladder, it is important to focus on school-wide issues, but in doing so, one must always pay attention to items important to teachers—items that make their school year and professional lives easier.

Let's take the example of a school program. Once the budget issues are ironed out, you, as a school leader, try to create a program that meets the needs of the students; that is, it provides course offerings to meet graduation needs and student course requests with few, if any, conflicts. As time goes on, you and your staff become proficient at this. For example, you soon realize that students advanced in one subject are usually advanced in almost all subjects. Therefore, in your program you schedule honors and "advanced" classes during different periods so that, let's say, qualified seventh graders could take Honors English, Honors Social Studies, Honors Math, and Honors Science. You would make sure that other classes they need to take are scheduled in periods when these singletons are not offered. You would do the same for those classes intended for students who need special academic support. However, you also have to consider teacher preferences and talents.

Almost any teacher will tell you that the schedule he receives in September will make or break his entire school year. This is not an exaggeration. It is an important workplace issue that will impact the quality of instruction each teacher will provide. In most school districts, it is also a contractual issue. There is a deadline whereby administration must provide teachers with a "program preference sheet" for their programs for

the upcoming year or semester. Every teacher is entitled to at least some of his requests.

The commentary that follows is based on a high school program. The strategies suggested can be adjusted and applied to middle school. Some are also applicable to elementary schools, but with significant extrapolation to suit the different program needs at this grade level.

School leaders find that different aspects of the program are important to different teachers. Some only care about the time schedule, early or late. Frequently, a request for an early or late schedule revolves around child care issues (pick up and drop off) and/or traffic conditions.

Some only care about the room they are assigned. They don't care what they teach as long as they teach it in a certain room, often a room they have decorated and use for material storage, or that has some other advantage, real or imagined, such as hours of direct sunlight. And for others, all that matters are the classes they are assigned.

Small schools with fewer course options are just as difficult to program as larger schools with multiple options. It is rare that any teacher can have every request met. Often, there are not enough rooms for every teacher to have his or her own, so rooms must be shared and some teachers will work in more than one room. There are usually more requests for early session than there are early session programs. There are many requests for the few honors classes that exist. How does the school leader juggle the requests from teachers given the program realities and limitations?

First, create a transparent program preference form, such as the one reproduced in figure 7.1.

Some explanations are needed. The "rotation" list alluded to in number 1 of figure 7.1 refers to a list of teachers who would be assigned to a time schedule they did not request. If the school has more than one time schedule, this will be the least popular one. The school keeps a list of staff by their seniority within each department or grade level, with the least senior teacher first and the most senior last. If someone is needed for the less popular schedule, it goes to the teacher at the top of the list; however, after his stint, he then moves to the bottom of the list. As per many teacher contracts, this illustrates the principle of program rotation.

Room assignment is usually not covered by contract, so this is an area of flexibility for supervisors. Of course, every effort is made to minimize the number of rooms assigned to a teacher (if possible, no more than two).

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Semester \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please indicate which session you prefer for next semester:  
     \_\_\_ Early (periods 1–8)  
     \_\_\_ Late (periods 2–9)  
*Note:* Where there are more requests for a session than there are existing slots, reference will be made to the “rotation” list.

2. Please indicate your room preference: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Note:* Assignment of rooms is not contractually determined, but based on program needs. In general, teachers with full five class programs are given a preference in room assignments.

3. Please indicate your first, second, and third preferences for your classes for next semester.  
     1st choice \_\_\_\_\_ (A list of the course offerings for  
     2nd choice \_\_\_\_\_ the upcoming semester has been  
     3rd choice \_\_\_\_\_ provided for reference.)  
*Note:* If you have a preference for an honors, advanced placement, or elective class, it will be assumed that you are volunteering for an extra, third prep. In addition, those assigned to teach honors or advanced placement classes will also be assigned freshmen and/or sophomore classes. Preferences are subject to contractual provisions.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

If this preference form is not returned by \_\_\_\_\_, requests cannot be honored.

**Figure 7.1. Program Preference Form**

Priority for assignment to a single room should be given to teachers with a full teaching program. Teachers with a reduced number of classes should then be fit into the remaining slots.

Most contracts specify that classes have to be rotated. For example, let's say there are six senior classes. Four teachers request senior classes. The school leader tries not to give teachers singleton preps (except in the case of honors, advanced placement, or elective classes), so only three teachers could be assigned senior classes. The teacher who most recently taught seniors would be excluded. School leaders must always keep copies of past programs for reference.

As you might expect, honors, advanced placement, and elective classes are popular. The school leader tries to avoid getting into preparation and rotation issues by indicating up front that such classes are singletons and

requesting one is almost certainly requesting a three prep program. In addition, the assignment of these classes can be linked with assignment to freshmen and sophomore classes (as there are always more of these available than are requested).

Suppose a teacher requesting an advanced class is a competent but not superior teacher and, according to contractual provisions of rotation of classes, is the next in line for such a class. Should the advanced class be given to this teacher? Yes. One of the responsibilities of a school leader is the enforcement of existing contracts. Not to make this assignment is to ask for a union grievance that the teacher would certainly win. In the eyes of most contracts, all teachers are equal and entitled to the same rights and protections.

Of course, the school leader may talk to the teacher, reminding him that such a class is more work than a regular class and also an extra prep in the schedule. She might obliquely indicate that he might not be the most qualified for such a class; however, if the teacher is adamant, there is little the school leader can do. On the other hand, if the teacher is amenable to change, the leader will make sure he has a program with as many of his other preferences as she can accommodate.

Elective classes are a separate issue. Such classes are usually designed for students who have passed the exit exam in a particular subject. Sometimes, they provide a specific theme for a course that covers the core curriculum for a particular grade level. A teacher who wants to teach an elective usually has to develop the curriculum (being sure that the objectives match those required by the state or district) and request texts well in advance of the class being offered. If enough students select the class for a section to be offered, the teacher who develops the curriculum teaches it. However, as most contracts specify rotation of classes, the class could be given to another teacher the next year.

As a department chairperson, Ms. Valletta solved this elective problem by reaching an unofficial agreement with her teachers and the union representative, one that balanced the spirit of the contract with the work of the teacher who developed the curriculum. This unwritten procedure gave the teacher who developed the course “exclusive” rights for three years. After that, if another teacher requested this elective, it would be rotated to her. However, this teacher would be responsible for developing her own curriculum and arranging for text orders in advance. Keep in mind that the

acceptance of such a proposal by all parties is not a given. Acceptance is far more likely in a school with a good ambience and where faculty, the union, and the administration work together and respect one another.

Department programming is complicated. However, as far as each teacher is concerned, the programming of schedules, rooms, and classes is not an academic puzzle for the assistant principal to work out, but a prerequisite for him to have a good school year.

Once a school leader gets to know the teachers he supervises better, he can refine the preference form in figure 7.1 to ask teachers to indicate which of the three items is the most important to them: schedule, room, or classes. This will provide more flexibility to the task of programming. If he honors one teacher's room preference, for example, he will have to worry less about her schedule or class preferences.

How should an assistant principal or department chair distribute programs to teachers? In some schools, teacher program creation is shrouded in secrecy and the first inkling a teacher has of his program is the official form he finds in his mailbox. This is asking for trouble.

People are more important than paper. Before this school leader puts any official schedule in a mailbox, she should speak with each teacher and discuss what his program will probably be. She will try to honor each teacher's "main" preference and, to a large extent, most of the preferences given.

On those rare occasions where the needs of students and the program matrix do not permit this, the school leader negotiates. She explains why it would be difficult to make a change in the projected program without having a negative effect on the programs of several other teachers and then promises that the next semester the teacher will have top priority for all of his preferences—and she honors her promise. If the negotiation fails, she tries to make a change that will satisfy the teacher while at the same time have minimal impact on other programs.

This is time-consuming. But, it will bring those most affected by the program into program decisions. In the end, it will minimize union grievances and program angst. Everyone will have at least part of what he or she wanted. When finalized programs are distributed, there will be no surprises.

Another teacher issue is accessibility to needed supplies. Teachers are hoarders and almost every teacher has paper, dry erase pens, erasers, and

so forth squirreled away somewhere. This is a response to shortages in the past, shortages caused by administrators who did not pay enough attention to this need.

If a school business manager or assistant principal of organization is good at his job and makes sure enough basic supplies are ordered and on hand, hoarding will never be a problem. If any extra money is made available, he resists the urge to buy something exotic and orders paper and other basic supplies to build up a stockpile that can be used if future supply budgets are cut.

A successful chairperson or assistant principal makes it a practice to put together a packet of materials for her teachers before they report for their first day of work in the fall. It would include instructional materials, such as the syllabi for each course they are teaching and basic classroom supplies: a ream of lined paper, a box of chalk and/or two or three dry erase pens, and a grade record book. (In New York City this would also include enough Delaney cards for each class. This is a New York City-specific item—cards that fit into slots in a Delaney book used to keep official attendance.)

If teachers need anything else, they provide the chairperson with a list so she may pick up all items at one time from whoever handles the distribution of materials in the school. The chairperson will have these items for the teachers the next morning. Aside from meeting the real concern of teachers to have the supplies they need to begin the school year, her work sends two messages: She cares about teacher needs and she has organized the department to meet these needs.

Another crucial need of teachers is access to duplication equipment. Back in the 1980s, departments had rexograph machines—some of you might remember these dinosaurs that used inked stencils and produced copies with blue print that, when just off the press, emitted a heady odor that could produce a slight high (or headache) if inhaled. English teachers love to duplicate materials, but usually have no sense of machine properties. If a machine is not working, usually because of a paper jam, they feel the best way to fix it is to run more paper through. This renders the machine totally useless and shuts down the department's ability to duplicate anything for a few days. This drives teachers crazy as they either have to do without needed materials or beg friends in other departments to admit them to their offices to do their work.

Assistant principals deal with such duplication issues. In general, humanities teachers fall into the “Let’s keep running paper through” method of “fixing” machines. Science and math teachers, the tinkerers, try to fix machines by taking them apart. An assistant principal of math and science went into his office one day to find his department’s photocopy machine in hundreds of pieces with one of his teachers trying to put it back together.

The effective department or grade level leader needs to learn to fix the duplication machines assigned to her office. This isn’t hard to do. She reads the manual on how to clear jams and reset the machines. Her teachers won’t care how she does it, but will appreciate that fixing their needed machines is one of her priorities.

The department or grade leader should also run a workshop with demonstrations on how to properly use the machines. This will include the admonition that if the machine doesn’t work or becomes stuck, turn it off and get the leader. If she is not in the office, they should leave a note for her that a machine needs repair. As soon as she sees the note, she repairs the machine (or calls for the repairman if the problem is beyond her mechanical ability). Teachers feel handicapped if they cannot duplicate materials.

As a principal, you may be able to solve this problem for your department supervisors. Principal Valletta of Manhattan High School took a more global perspective on this issue when she became principal. She found that every department had a medium volume photocopy machine under repair contract. These machines, complicated to repair, especially if abused, were a budgetary stress. Most became obsolete within two years. A new method of insuring that teachers had access to duplication was needed.

Teachers in New York City are entitled, under contract, to Teacher’s Choice monies. This is money provided directly to teachers by the district so they may purchase materials for their classrooms. While the procedure for doing this has changed several times, the basic principle remains the same: Any items purchased belong to the school, not the individual teacher, and are to remain in the school for use by teachers and students. It is assumed that items such as paper, writing implements, and art materials would be consumed by students.

Teacher’s Choice was intended to ensure that teachers had all the basic supplies they needed, as many school administrators were remiss in providing these. Manhattan High School’s leaders were not among these. No



teacher at this school ever had to worry about basic supplies. Therefore, it was not unusual for departments to “pool” their Teacher’s Choice funds to make major purchases, such as a television with a VCR/DVD setup for use in classrooms. This set a precedent.

Principal Valletta decided to tackle the duplication problem through creative use of these monies. The union representative was in agreement there was a duplication crisis with department machines breaking down more and more frequently. Ms. Valletta proposed establishing a duplication center where teachers could bring materials to be reproduced and have them ready for use the next day. If the majority of the teachers agreed to contribute half of their Teacher’s Choice monies to the maintenance of this room to pay for ink/toner and the photocopier repair contract costs, she would budget school funds to purchase two top-of-the-line, high-volume machines.

In addition, the school would pay for a full-time school aide to run this equipment. Any items delivered to the room before noon would be ready for the teacher the following morning. The union representative agreed and about two-thirds of the staff put in half their funds, more than enough to cover the supply and maintenance costs.

This worked very well. The aide was trained in correct use of the machines and basic repairs. When he saw that a problem was beyond his ability, he called the company’s repairman. The aide was efficient. On days when there were a normal number of requests, he could fill orders as teachers waited. There were few breakdowns, the school could trade in and upgrade machines more frequently, and teachers could be very certain they would have their materials when they needed them.

Teachers need books. This seems simple, but it is not always the easiest need to fill. The cost of books has risen astronomically. In some areas such as math and science a single text now costs more than seventy dollars. New schools are given start-up funds so that they can open with all the texts and other books they need. However, once a school is established, the book allocation (in New York State) comes from state book monies. Each school is allotted so much money per student each year. This amount could never pay for a new book in each class for each student, nor is it intended to. Under New York State guidelines, a textbook should last five years; a paperback book, three years. Therefore, the money is deemed

sufficient to pay for replacement copies when books become obsolete or just too beat up to use.

What is not taken into consideration is book loss when students do not return or lose their books. As an English department chair, Mr. Thelen needed to minimize book loss so he could order new titles. He made use of some simple but effective techniques.

First, he kept the needs of his teachers in mind. There must be enough sets of each title so that all teachers who wish to use that title will have access to it. In other departments this was simple as students were issued a single textbook for the semester or year. Distribution and collection was a onetime affair. However, Mr. Thelen's language arts departments made use of paperbacks and issued several titles a semester. It's simple math: The more books issued, the more books will be lost.

His department's book losses were significant. Mr. Thelen met with his teachers and explained the situation. They wanted to add more recent titles. He was unable to do so because allocated monies were being used for replacement copies of existing titles. The solution was simple: get more books back. He established a simple policy: No student receives a new book until the previous book issued is returned.

He advised teachers on ways to encourage students to return books. Usually, the unit on a particular book ends with an examination. If students are told that the return of the book is worth ten points on this exam, more books will be returned. If the exam is "open book," even more books will be collected with the test. When his department implemented these policies, book loss was greatly reduced.

When a school leader moves from department supervisor to principal, he will need to establish school-wide policies. Mr. Pfizer in his Chicago middle school implemented effective strategies. At the end of each school year, any book receipts for unreturned books were collected by the supervisor in charge of school security. He and the dean's staff added targeting book delinquents to their list of duties.

A school-wide list of book delinquents was generated and given to all staff members at the beginning of the school year. Mr. Pfizer directed that no student on the list was to be given a book by any teacher until he presented a "book account cleared" receipt. (See chapter 4 for a different method of encouraging book return that led to an irate call from the superintendent.)

Mr. Pfizer's results were not all positive. While teachers want to have books, they also dislike not giving books to students. Students who are not issued books cannot do assignments or participate in class. Some teachers felt this was worse than not issuing a book as it disrupted instruction. It was left to the deans to call the parents of students who still owed books.

Teachers dislike class disruptions, whether these are unexpected visitors, public address (PA) announcements, or fire drills. One task of the school leader is to reduce these disruptions and permit teachers to have uninterrupted instructional time. Let's look at the three items just mentioned.

Some unexpected visitors, such as a school leader conducting an unannounced observation, cannot be helped. Of course, the principal or assistant principal will be as unobtrusive as possible. Teachers can be better prepared for other visitors. Successful principals often have visitors from other schools, districts, states, or countries sent to the school to look at some of their instructional methods. Such principals plan carefully for such visits. If the plan calls for these visitors to sit in on any classes, teachers are informed well enough in advance so they may opt out. Most will not opt out as being on the visitor list is a validation of their work, but they will know to expect visitors and may prepare their students in advance.

Once a year, Mr. Thelen's magnate academic-vocational school hosted a feeder school luncheon where guidance counselors from feeder schools were invited to visit the building to learn about the school's programs so they could better advise their graduating eighth graders. Mr. Thelen hoped these counselors would be impressed and advise some of their best students to apply to one or more of the special programs.

Part of this event included a tour of the school. Student guides had specific rooms to bring these visitors to, and these teachers were informed in advance that they would almost certainly have visitors. However, the student guides were told to permit the visitors to enter any room they desired. No one wanted the guests to think this was a "dog and pony show," directing them only to the best teachers with the best students. So, all staff were informed that this was going to be a special day and that they should be ready for visitors during any morning class. They were also told that the more middle school students who applied for special programs, the more secure were their own positions.

In general, PA announcements are abused by every institution. A teacher is building her lesson to a resounding crescendo when a grating voice booms from the PA box reminding students that lunch applications must be turned in the next day. When Ms. Hildebrand first became a middle school principal, she had more complaints about the PA announcements than anything else. She developed a procedure that can be replicated in most schools.

She limited all regular announcements to the last five minutes of a designated class (which she extended five minutes so no instructional time was lost). If anyone wanted to make an announcement at any other time, he needed Ms. Hildebrand's permission or that of her designee. In most schools, this is easy to enforce as there are a limited number of PA system microphones. Ms. Hildebrand's Chicago middle school, for example, had only two, in the main office and the principal's office. Once people realized that their announcements would not be made at just any time, they learned to make them during the designated time. To be fair, Ms. Hildebrand also disciplined herself and her designee not to use the PA system except in emergency situations.

In New York City and most school communities, the number of fire drills and shelter drills required is defined by district policy. It is a significant number as this is a safety issue. As every educator knows, each drill negatively impacts on the period in which it takes place, basically ending any real instruction during this period. In very large schools or vertical buildings, it also impacts on the next period because of the time it takes to get all the students back into the building and into their classes.

Most schools try not to schedule drills during the first two periods, when students are entering the school to begin their day. If the school is using scanning technology for security reasons, a drill during this time defeats the security measures. In addition, principals know that having drills during a lunch period creates havoc. When you eliminate the periods when students are reporting to school and lunch periods, there may be only three or four periods left in the day suitable for drills, concentrating the loss of instructional time in these classes.

There are some creative ways to deal with the fire and shelter drill requirements. You may find some of these useful.

- It is not unusual for schools to have incoming students report to school a day before the entire student body reports. They are given an orientation to the school, learn its layout and the location of offices, and meet their teachers. If their day ends with a rapid dismissal fire drill, they are learning the proper behavior and exits for a fire drill and eliminating one required drill.
- Most schools have shortened days for one reason or another. In New York City, students have half days during the scheduled fall and spring parent-teacher conference afternoons. There are no after-school activities on shortened days, so having rapid dismissal fire drills is appropriate.
- In many school districts, a leftover from the Cold War is the shelter drill. During the Cold War years, such drills naively had students scrunch under their desks, hands over their heads, to protect themselves from a nuclear attack. In most communities, this has been redefined as a drill on procedures for protecting students during a terrorist attack or natural disaster, such as a flood, nor'easter, hurricane, or tornado. Students are to be brought to a secure place with minimal windows and doors. In many schools this secure place is the auditorium. Every school has a full-school assembly a few times during the school year. This process of bringing all students to the auditorium, the secure place, is a shelter drill.
- Many students are in schools before classes begin. They are there for reduced or free breakfast, early morning club meetings, tutoring, and so on. As a fire could take place anytime, it is legitimate to have a fire drill before the school day even begins. To the consternation of staff and students, a principal once scheduled such a fire drill for 7:30 in the morning (classes began at 8:15). It was found that over one-fourth of the student body was already in the building.
- Likewise many students are in the school after the regular school day. A fire drill could be scheduled then as well.
- Students get excited before a holiday recess. On the last school day before the Thanksgiving, winter, or spring recess, teachers try to channel this excitement through creative, often holiday-themed lessons. Ending such a day with a rapid dismissal fire drill meets the needs of students and staff anxious to begin their holiday.
- In New York City, one drill was required during a lunch period. As noted previously, a fire could occur at any time. It is best to have such a drill begin during the last five minutes of the last scheduled lunch

period. This will disrupt the next class, but students will be able to eat their lunches.

By implementing all or some of these strategies, a school leader will greatly reduce the disruption of instruction caused by required drills. It is important to make sure staff and students know the proper fire drill procedures and exits; however, this must be done in such a way as to minimize impact on teaching and learning.

Another problem that disrupts instruction and upsets everyone—parents, students, and teachers—is the school evacuation. The most common reasons for a principal to consider evacuating a school are an actual fire or a threatening phone call.

Depending on the community and the construction materials used in the building, fires in a school will be on a range from nonexistent to rare. With one exception, Principal Niles-Perry's experience with real fires consisted of those set in a trash basket by a student attempting to disrupt the school day. By having procedures to locate and put out such minor fires, evacuations can be prevented.

In most schools, whenever a fire alarm is set off, an office in the school has a panel that indicates the location of the ringing alarm. At Ms. Niles-Perry's Los Angeles school, this panel was in the custodian's office. As soon as it rang, he sent his staff with fire extinguishers to the location and notified the school security agents and supervisor of school security. The time lapse from the sounding of the alarm to the arrival of staff could be measured in seconds, and a small fire was put out while the alarm was still ringing.

Ms. Niles-Perry used the standard procedure found in most schools. As soon as a fire alarm rings, staff and students line up at the door for evacuation. They wait a few seconds for a confirming gong or the "all-clear" signal. In the case of a fire extinguished by the custodian, there would be an all-clear signal and a short PA announcement that a small fire was completely extinguished near room xxx (so that any staff or students smelling smoke would know the danger was past).

Every now and then, there is a student who thinks it is a good idea to set off fire alarms to disrupt the school day. On these occasions, the custodial and security staffs arrive at the location of the sounding alarm and find

no fire. The all-clear signal is given. However, this student has broken the law. Setting off a false fire alarm is a potentially dangerous act, as people could be injured during an evacuation.

The supervisor of school security in Ms. Niles-Perry's school came up with an ingenious way to identify such students. The fire alarms in the school required a person to pull a lever. This supervisor had the custodial staff paint this lever with very thick, viscous purple mimeograph ink. This ink never dries and is indelible. Anyone pulling the lever would find he had a purple hand, making it easy for Ms. Niles-Perry's staff to locate the perpetrator of a false alarm. The fire marshal, the police, and the student's parents would be notified and, in some cases, charges were pressed. Once word of the repercussions of sending a false alarm permeates a school, such false alarms will cease.

The second cause of evacuations is the threatening phone call. During Mr. Thelen's days as a teacher at a large comprehensive high school during the turbulent 1970s, such bomb threats were relatively common. The administration, to avoid frequent evacuations, had a code for all staff. A PA announcement that "the superintendent is in the building" meant a bomb threat had been received. All staff members were to continue conducting classes while at the same time looking into desk and cabinet drawers in the classroom as security checked around the school. Nothing was ever found and the all-clear signal—"The superintendent has left the building"—meant there would be no evacuation.

During 2001–2002, there was a resurgence of bomb threats after 9/11. On one occasion, police detectives came to Ms. Valletta's office to say that they had received a "credible" threat, but it was her decision whether or not to evacuate the school. Ms. Valletta considered this carefully, but decided not to evacuate, sending notification of the decision to the superintendent. In a city filled with landmarks, why would a terrorist target her obscure school in a quiet residential area? Nothing happened. There was one more threat and again, nothing happened. Yes, Principal Valletta took a chance, albeit a miniscule one. The alternative would have been to evacuate and then face ever more ersatz bomb threats leading to daily evacuations and disruptions.

Today's principal, especially in rural and suburban areas, will be faced with threats of a Columbine nature. If law enforcement indicates the threat is credible, the leader should evacuate immediately.

\* \* \*

Another teacher bugaboo is the class coverage. Almost every teacher feels that finding a coverage assignment in her mailbox at the beginning of the day ruins the entire day and diminishes instruction in her regular classes as the period of the coverage was going to be used for lesson planning or rating papers that needed to be returned that day. Class coverages are a fact of life in any school, but a school leader mindful of school issues will develop procedures to minimize their impact on the staff.

First, the very teachers appalled by coverages must take responsibility for them. The later a teacher calls in sick, the less the likelihood a substitute can be found. A teacher who is not feeling well but comes to school and then has to leave early is giving his colleagues coverages. So the first step in reducing coverages is to have teachers take responsibility for themselves by following some simple guidelines:

- If an absence is necessary, inform administration in advance, if possible. If the illness comes on suddenly, be professional and call the school prior to 6:00 a.m.
- If you are ill, don't come to school, for it is impossible to find a substitute teacher if you need to go home.
- Schedule any necessary appointments after your school day, but if you do have to see a doctor during the school day, don't come in for part of the day and put the burden of coverages on your colleagues when you leave for this appointment.
- If you wish to arrange coverages in advance with your colleagues, then you are free to do so, as long as you inform administration. A true professional will do all possible to minimize the coverages administration has to assign.

Second, administration has to take responsibility for having a viable list of substitute teachers who are usually available and for arranging time schedules so an assistant principal or assigned teacher is in the school early to call substitutes and provide each a schedule. If for some reason, such as a school-wide flu epidemic or very inclement weather, a large percentage of staff is absent and substitutes cannot be found, administration needs backup plans. Classes during the same period can be consolidated. Several classes



of students can report to a large classroom or auditorium or lunch room for a lesson taught by an assistant principal or, in a pinch, for a movie.

Third, administration can be creative. An assistant principal of organization surveyed staff in her school to determine which staff members *wanted* coverages and which period(s) they were available. In this district, by contract, any coverages beyond two per year were paid coverages. In every school there are some teachers who could use additional pay. Such a survey reduces coverages for teachers who do not want them and, at the same time, provides them for teachers who do.

Another method this same assistant principal of organization used was to have an unofficial coverage “debt.” Sometimes there are unavoidable emergencies that may force a teacher to leave school early: his child is ill and has to be picked up from school; there is an emergency with a relative or close friend; the teacher does get suddenly ill during the school day. In such cases, the assistant principal has to issue coverages for the remaining classes in his program. However, this teacher “owes” the school these coverages and is expected to give “free coverages” back to make up for them. This isn’t exactly contractual, but it is fair. It should be noted that the teacher having to leave could have had his salary docked for the time missed; making up the coverages prevents this.

Finally, coverages are sometimes caused by staff acting as chaperones on school trips. As much as possible, teachers going on the trips should be expected to make arrangements for their own class coverages with their colleagues. When these colleagues chaperone other trips, the favor could be returned.

These procedures will not eliminate all coverages. Today, in most districts, schools have to pay for substitute teachers and for individual class coverages out of their regular budget—the more allotted for this, the less available for other needs. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to assign as many “free” coverages to each teacher as allowed by the contract. After this, the school is going to pay, whether it hires substitutes or gives coverages, so implementing the preceding ideas will reduce emergency coverages and, in the case of “owed coverages,” reduce the money that needs to be allocated for coverages.

Some workplace issues involve staff other than teachers. The spring of Mr. Thelen’s first year as principal, major budget cuts hit New York City.

Retirement incentives were given to teachers to minimize layoffs. However, as class size limits were mandated by contract, some of the retirees actually had to be replaced. This neophyte principal looked for ways to cut the budget. The school had a significant number of full-time school aides. An easy fix would be to reduce their hours from seven hours a day to five or four (school aides were hourly employees). Being inexperienced and insensitive, Mr. Thelen wrote this cut into the budget. It wasn't until later that he realized that for a relatively small budgetary saving, he had caused several people severe financial stress.

A few school aides were semiretired people who did not totally rely on their salary. For others, however, this was their only source of income and this cavalier cut made it difficult for them to make ends meet. The situation was rectified in the next budget, and Mr. Thelen learned that the numbers on any budget line represent people who have their own lives and budgets to contend with.

Years later, Principal Thelen remembered this lesson. When it was mandated that School Leadership Teams have input into the school's budget, he began his budget training session with this same idea: "The numbers you see are not just numbers, but people like you, who need a job in order to survive." Principal Thelen described the people involved and explained how each contributed to the running of the school to make it a better place for students. Neither he nor the leadership team made any attempt to make cuts that would disrupt the lives of real people. They were never forced to deal with major budget cuts.

Some of the "principles of educational leadership" have a negative or downside. Not this one. You will never go wrong by remembering the issues most important to the people who make your school work.



## *Chapter Eight*

# **Lay the Groundwork: Get All Your Ducks in a Row**

In today's world of school leadership, *collaboration*, *shared decision making*, and *empowerment* are buzz words. In most school districts, they describe the preferred leadership style of supervisors, from chairs to superintendents. So, instead of school leaders making a decision, they must consult and meet with affected parties, collaborate with interested parties, and bring their ideas to the appropriate venues (School Leadership Team, Academic Affairs Committee, Safety Committee, Parent Association, Union Consultative Council, Student Council, etc.) before actually acting and implementing.

Decisions that could have been made and implemented almost immediately now take days, weeks, or months to make and implement. For the savvy school leader, the final result will be the same; however, the amount of time and effort required will be exponentially increased.

That is the downside. The upside is decisions are not seen as top-down mandates, but as the result of advisement and input. Instead of decision making being a one-person monopoly, it is seen as a process for achieving consensus. Decisions are more likely to be well implemented, succeed, and become part of the fabric of the school culture. There still will be the day-to-day operational decisions the school leader will make, but these will usually reflect the policy decisions made by consensus.

A competent school leader, by experience and training, has an instinctive grasp of what is best for the students and the school. As a school leader, you will be pressed for time on all fronts and will be tempted to act and implement almost in unison. Over time, you will learn that engaging

others in the decision-making process leads to broader support for decisions and better implementation.

The issue is not whether to collaborate—this is a given. The issue is how to be sure that the plan or policy you want implemented will survive this process and become the plan or policy for the school. The question for you becomes: How can I manipulate the process to reach consensus on what I know is best for my school? *Manipulate* is a strong word with negative connotations. *Convince* is more politically correct, but not strong enough. All of us who are school leaders must face a simple fact: We all want what is best for children, and we will usually use whatever legal means necessary to achieve this, including manipulation. This is the political side of school leadership.

In general, major decisions and policies will not be decided upon in a timely fashion at meetings unless the groundwork is laid. The school leader needs to speak to the key players one-on-one in advance to secure their support. In this way, the meeting will not be a free-for-all discussion with different individuals riding their own hobbyhorses, but a confirmation of what has already been decided in a series of one-on-one conversations. There are several ways to lay the groundwork to get one's ducks in a row.

In New York City, the School Leadership Team (SLT), composed of representatives from administration, staff (defined as representatives of the teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers), parents, and, on the high school level, students, is the major decision-making body in the school. Most districts require schools to have a similar committee. In most states and districts, this committee is advisory to the principal, who makes and is responsible for all decisions; however, principals would be politically inept if they ignored this team. The SLT is charged with two major roles: the creation of the school's Comprehensive Education Plan and budget. In addition, it may explore almost any other aspect of school policy.

In some schools such committees are very large, sometimes composed of twenty or more people. This is a mistake. The school leader, who has latitude in determining the size of such an oversight committee, should make it the smallest permitted by regulation. The fewer people on a committee, the greater the likelihood that consensus will be reached. A minimal team for a high school in New York State has ten members:

- Two administrators: The principal and an assistant principal selected by the other assistant principals. By regulation, the principal had to be on the committee.
- Two teachers: the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) chapter leader and another teacher selected by the chapter leader or by vote of the union membership.
- Four parents selected by the Parent Association. In most schools, these are officers of the Parent Association.
- For a high school SLT, two students, selected by the Student Organization.

In some schools, a leadership committee meets biweekly or even weekly for lengthy meetings. This is a time imposition on all and almost ensures that only the most fanatical would regularly attend, skewing the discussions and decisions. Mr. Chen became principal at his Brooklyn high school when the SLT was in its formative stages. It was agreed at that time that the team would meet once a month, unless there was an emergency issue. (A note on the SLT's "formative" stages: The principal, UFT chapter leader, Parent Association president, and president of the Student Organization met to create the bylaws for the SLT.)

Meetings were scheduled after school hours and immediately before the regular monthly Parent Association meeting. This limited the number of times the parent members of the SLT had to come to the school, which they very much appreciated, and also set a time limit on meeting. They began at 4:30 and ended by 6:00. Mr. Chen made sure sandwiches and other refreshments were available.

In schools with large SLTs, it takes forever for any decisions to be made as different people attend each meeting and significant meeting time must be devoted to informing those not present at the previous meeting what had transpired. Mr. Chen's SLT's bylaws stated that a quorum for the meeting was the presence of at least one representative from each of the four constituencies. If any member was absent, it was the responsibility of that member's representative to inform him of what had transpired before the next meeting. This ensured that the committee could move forward at each meeting instead of in circles.

Much of the "groundwork" had been laid during the creation of the initial SLT team: membership was minimized, number of meetings limited,

and a reasonable quorum policy determined. At the time, Mr. Chen did not realize the positive impact this would have years into the future. When he saw the issues many of his colleagues were having with their SLTs, he realized how lucky he was. Newly appointed principals may inherit oversight teams with a different history of bylaws and procedures. They have a “honeymoon” period that sometimes gives them significant latitude in reforming school procedures. They should use this time to examine the operations of this team.

Once such a team is in place, how does the school leader ensure it will support his vision for the school? Most members of the team have little or no idea about how a school operates or how a budget is determined. It is the responsibility of the principal to teach the members of this committee. The principal lays the groundwork by being a master teacher.

If the new school leader makes use of a standard ritual for the first meeting of her leadership team, meetings for the rest of the year will flow more smoothly. Ms. Valletta had such a ritual. She scheduled the first meeting as early as possible in the school year and contacted all members at least two weeks in advance to be sure there was a quorum. She sent out a standard first meeting agenda: introduction of team members, selection of team chairperson, review of the Comprehensive Education Plan (this may have a different title in your district), review of school statistics, planning the agendas for future meetings. This agenda laid the groundwork for the rest of the school year.

At the first meeting, Ms. Valletta gave all attendees a hefty folder of materials. These contents could be adjusted according to the specific needs of any school and district.

- The names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers of the committee members
- The bylaws of the leadership team
- The district’s document on “conflict of interest” as it applied to the team (in New York City there had been some monetary hanky-panky in some schools)
- The previous year’s Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP), usually a hefty document
- The latest school report card generated by the district, usually one year out of date

- All the previous year's student achievement results (i.e., results of standardized tests)
- A copy of the school budget for the current school year
- A list of suggestions for updating the CEP
- Tentative meeting dates for the school year

Everyone was overwhelmed by paper at this first meeting—except Ms. Valletta. She generated most of the paper and was thoroughly familiar with everything. This is the great advantage she has as principal. The principal is the only team member who remains every year. All the others are usually elected for one- or two-year terms. The longer a principal serves, the more she is the only team member who knows the history of the leadership team and is thoroughly familiar with all the relevant documents.

Knowledge is power, but there is an important corollary: Sharing knowledge is the greatest power. So this first meeting, and to a large extent all meetings, featured Ms. Valletta using her teaching skills to share her knowledge of all aspects of the school. As team members changed each year, her instruction was repeated year after year for a new audience.

At this first meeting, she volunteered to serve as chairperson and be responsible for preparing and sending out meeting summaries, reminding team members of meeting dates, and arranging for refreshments. She reminded the team that she had secretarial support and could therefore easily handle these responsibilities. All agreed. Serving as chairperson helped her to implement a principle described in chapter 10, "Monitor the Communication."

Next, Ms. Valletta and her team looked at the school statistics. She explained what each item meant and what it revealed about the school. She also provided the statistics on schools in the district similar to her own so that the team could make comparative judgments. Members of the team could immediately see where the school was doing well and feel proud of these achievements. They could also see any challenges. For these, Ms. Valletta was proactive, providing explanations and plans for improvement.

All schools, even those with few if any statistical issues, have areas they want to address in the coming school year. She pointed these out as the possible focal points for future agenda items. She concluded this part of the meeting by asking everyone to read all the statistical material before the next meeting, when members could raise other issues or questions.



She found that issues were rarely raised because no one reviewed anything. So, at the second meeting, the items she had pointed out became the ones the team dealt with for that school year. Her “lesson” and open sharing of information had achieved their aim.

She then had the team look at the CEP. The heart of most such documents is the list of goals and objectives for the current school year and the strategies for achieving them. If any team members present were also on the team the previous year, she asked them to describe how the previous year’s team had devised these goals and objectives. She added that in preparing the CEP for the next school year, the team need not rewrite the whole document, but concentrate on those areas needing improvement, such as the ones she previously pointed out. Again, she asked all team members to read the document and bring any questions, concerns, and ideas to the next meeting.

In most schools, the budget is an almost incomprehensible jumble of funding sources, line items, and expenses. Principal Valletta explained that at a future meeting she would conduct a workshop on how to read her school’s budget. After all members of the team had a basic understanding of the budget, and once the committee decided on priorities for the next school year, they would be able to determine how their budget may be appropriately tweaked.

During Ms. Valletta’s first few years working with the SLT, the New York City chancellor asked each SLT what their five priorities would be if the school was to be given additional funds. This was always the subject of one SLT meeting. The starting point was the areas for improvement and then the generation of a wish list. The school was never given additional funds. However, the ideas generated formed a basis for revisions in the coming year’s CEP and budget, within the constraints imposed by the latter. Even after this request for priorities was discontinued, Ms. Valletta devoted a fall SLT meeting to address the questions, “What are our priorities for next year? What funds would we like to use to address these priorities?” You might find it useful to do the same.

The next topic for this first meeting of the year was determining the main agenda topics for the remaining meetings of the school year. The principal asked each team member what he or she wanted to see on the agenda. Some topics had been implicitly decided upon: feedback on review of the school statistics; discussion of priorities for the coming school year; planning the budget; writing the CEP. Others might be added; for

example, over the years, Ms. Valletta saw this committee address topics from revising the school's safety plan to establishing a dress code. Once the items were determined, the principal had the committee prioritize them. As chairperson, she was left with the task of placing each on the agenda of the appropriate meeting.

A final topic was looking at the meeting dates and times Ms. Valletta had proposed for the year. As the principal based these on the dates used the previous year, they were always approved. She then told her team that she would snail mail and/or e-mail everyone a reminder about and agenda for the next meeting, as well as a draft of the summary of the previous meeting, at least one week prior to the determined date.

Ms. Valletta ended this meeting with a debriefing go-around. She asked each team member to give a one- or two-minute reaction to the meeting. She listened to the responses to gauge if positive feelings had been generated and if everyone felt that his or her input had been respected. If she detected any problem, Ms. Valletta corrected it at the next meeting. For example, if any member felt he had not participated enough, she would make sure he was involved more at the next meeting.

Because of the groundwork the principal laid before and during the first meeting, the remainder of her meetings went smoothly. All team members knew where the school stood academically because all relevant information was shared. Because Ms. Valletta did not try to hide or cover up anything, providing all appropriate documents, she gained the trust of the committee members. At subsequent meetings, she provided full explanations for the creation of the CEP and budget, continuing in her role as master teacher.

Let's take a minute to look at the budget issue, a major problem in some schools. The school leader can make this a nonissue by explaining the budget, not in terms of dollars and cents or even in terms of programs, but in terms of people, as noted in the last chapter. By the end of the budget mini-workshop, team members will understand that every numerical entry represents a person—a teacher, administrator, paraprofessional, secretary, or school aide. These are all people like them, trying to do their jobs and support their families. Looking at a budget in this manner makes it much harder for anyone to say, "Let's slash a budget line."

Finally, the school leader needs to explain the limitations that come with a budget so that everyone understands that the team's maneuverability is

limited by everything from Title I and other funding guidelines to the contractual provisions of several unions.

Ms. Valletta made sure she took the five priorities determined by the committee (with her gentle maneuvering) seriously. Even though she never received additional funds, she tried to incorporate these priorities into no- or low-cost strategies for the next CEP.

The bottom line with all such school committees is that only the principal has the full vision of the school in all its aspects. The more the principal shares this vision and all relevant information and the better she teaches the team about the operation of the school, the greater the trust the team will have in the principal and the more likely they are to accept the suggestions made. So, here and elsewhere, sharing knowledge is the key. This is a positive form of manipulation.

Principal Valletta in Manhattan High School also worked with the Academic Affairs Committee. This committee, required by the New York State Department of Education, was composed of staff, parents, and students, but with no required ratio. All matters relating to course accreditation and graduation came under its purview. For example, this committee decided upon the criteria for determining the valedictorian. Many schools around the country have similar committees.

At this point, it would be useful to describe how members of this committee and others with nonelected members were determined through the principal's creative manipulation.

At the first staff meeting in September, Ms. Valletta gave all teachers a committee sign-up sheet. All the existing school committees were listed. Anyone interested in volunteering to serve on a committee indicated, in order of preference, which committee he or she wanted to serve on. All committees met once a month during the regular school day, so no one would be required to stay after their regular school day. This greatly encouraged staff to volunteer while at the same time providing the principal with the ability to manipulate committee membership.

Ms. Valletta checked who had signed up for each committee and then checked teacher schedules to determine which period most of the volunteers for each committee would have no class assignment. It was impossible that everyone would be free the same period, so the period the majority were free was *usually* made the meeting period. Sometimes, if

Ms. Valletta wanted to make sure that a certain teacher was not on a particular committee, it just happened that that committee met at a time when that teacher had a class. Of course, this teacher was kept informed. He received meeting summaries and was asked for his input. However, once a teacher could not be on a committee in person, he usually didn't care.

Specific assistant principals were *encouraged* to volunteer for certain committees; for example, the assistant principal of pupil personnel services (guidance) was asked to serve on the Academic Affairs Committee and the assistant principal of security to serve on the School Safety Committee. Beyond this, there was no manipulation. In general, each officer of the Parent Association volunteered to serve on a committee. The teacher who advised the Student Organization found student volunteers.

One issue brought to the Academic Affairs Committee was that of a student dress code. This was referred to the student government, which wrote an excellent statement:

The following are prohibited in the school:

- Clothing with offensive words, pictures, or symbols
- Extra-short midriff tops
- See-through tops and pants
- Micro mini-skirts
- Unduly suggestive pants or shorts
- Tops held together by a few strings
- Do rags

All staff are requested to enforce a "no hat" rule, equally applied to both males and females.

Inappropriately dressed students are to be sent to the deans.

Teachers are urged to remember that they are the adult role models of appropriate dress in the business world.

The Academic Affairs Committee did not change a word of the "prohibition" part and just made minor changes in the language of the remainder (reflected in the preceding). Then it went on to the Parent Association and the SLT, both of whom approved it. With the approval of all major committees and constituencies, the school had a dress code it could enforce.

Another major policy statement determined by an Academic Affairs Committee concerned guidelines for marking and grading. Ms. Rivera in her suburban New York high school was putting together a teacher handbook, involving as many members of the school community as possible in its creation. Marking and grading guidelines officially fell under the auspices of this committee.

Her goal was to have all staff use similar guidelines to ensure fairness of assessment regardless of teacher, while at the same time providing for individual differences within different disciplines and teacher styles.

With so many variables involved, this was going to be difficult and involve discussions over several meetings. The committee needed direction to know where to begin. So, when Ms. Rivera introduced the topic, she explained the general goal and raised two issues that such a policy statement would have to address: cumulative grading and makeup work for assignments and examinations.

All constituents on the committee agreed that fairness of assessment with flexibility for teachers was to be the goal of the final policy. Students, parents, and guidance counselors wanted fairness. Teachers wanted room for some maneuverability. At the same time, all saw the need for a general policy to guarantee fairness. When introducing any topic, a school leader needs to remember with whom she is working. She begins with an understanding of their needs and preconceptions. She phrases what she has to say in such a way that everyone at the table feels his needs are being addressed.

All committee members needed to understand the concept of cumulative grading. Taking on the role of teacher, Ms. Rivera fully explained this concept, using much of the language and examples previously developed for her new teacher workshops and later incorporated in the final document (reproduced here in appendix A). The main aspects were accepted as a blueprint to be refined, giving the topic focus. Similarly, methods for dealing with assignment and examination makeups were explained and general consensus reached.

Interestingly enough, it was the students on the committee who came up with the most modifications in all areas. Students on such a committee tend to be those who do well in school. They expressed a great deal of latent anger at the unfairness they saw in teacher methods of grading and providing makeup work.

For example, these students worked all year to attain good grades. They were upset when they saw that other students who did little work until the final weeks of a semester had earned similar grades. The students on the committee tended to turn in their assignments on time. They were upset that students who turned in work late, sometimes the day before the end of the term, had it accepted with little or no penalty. Much of the final language in the policy statement came from this student input.

Principal Rivera listened and took notes on the discussion of each topic. At the next meeting, she provided a draft of a policy statement based on the discussion—first on cumulative grading, then on assignment makeup, then on test makeup. In each case, this draft incorporated the general consensus of ideas previously discussed, based on the blueprint originally provided. With minor changes to the language, over several meetings, the committee developed a real policy statement. While such a statement will differ from school to school and level to level, the final document (appendix A) devised by this committee addresses many of the issues confronting all schools in all districts throughout the country.

Another major issue tackled by the Academic Affairs Committee was the very contentious issue of granting students course credit for passing required standardized New York State exams (Regents Examinations) if they had previously failed a course leading up to a particular examination. In the current educational climate where more and more testing is being required by every school district, this will become a more and more contentious issue.

Let's look at an explanatory example of granting course credit through a test. All students had to pass a required examination in global history. This exam covered two years of instruction in the ninth and tenth years. All students took one semester courses called Global 1, Global 2, Global 3, and Global 4. At the end of Global 4, students took the exam.

When this test was first initiated as testing two years of study, many schools held students back if they failed any course. So, students failing Global 1 retook Global 1 before moving on. This led to the creation of off-term sections of courses and additional teacher preparations. It also confused programming, with guidance counselors having to keep very careful track of passing and failing in all subjects. Because of these negatives, over the course of a few years, Ms. Rivera eliminated this holding back of students in all subject areas.

More attention was paid to making sure that instruction was spiraled, ensuring continuous review of material taught in previous semesters and allowing students to move on to the next course in the subject sequence even if they failed the previous course (a student failing Global 1 moved on to Global 2). Students were programmed to summer school for courses failed because they needed to earn the credit required for graduation. Not all students chose to attend summer school.

This led to a dilemma. What do you do with an upperclassman who passed the required examination but failed one or more courses leading up to it? These students met the state testing requirement but still needed to earn credit for one or more courses. It did not make sense for students, now in their eleventh or twelfth year, to sit with ninth-year students to retake Global 1 or Global 2 either during the regular school year or in summer school. This is not just a New York State or high school problem. With high-stakes testing extending throughout K–12 in multiple subject areas, it is a national issue. Principal Rivera's experiences trying to create a school policy might help other school leaders facing this same problem.

Ms. Rivera prepared the draft of a proposal covering all academic areas to address this issue. Because this would be a difficult proposal to convince the Academic Affairs Committee members to accept, she was very careful with the wording of the draft. She spent considerable time getting her ducks in a row, speaking with individual committee members in advance to get their input and points of view. As much as possible, their ideas and actual words were used in the draft proposal, designed to address four main concerns.

- First, one of a school's main responsibilities is to graduate students on time.
- Second, it did not make sense for upperclassman to retake classes with underclassman if they had passed the required state examination.
- Third, by passing this exam, the students had demonstrated competency in the subject area, regardless of past performance in class.
- Fourth (and this will seem contradictory), students learn much more in the classroom than the knowledge they need to pass exams—they learn responsibility, team work, presentation skills, discussion skills, research skills, and so on. So, even if the student passes an exam, this does not mean that he has learned all that he needs for future success in college

or career. To deny this is to deny the role of the teacher charged with all aspects of a child's education, not just examination preparation.

In the final analysis, any policy created had to balance the first three considerations with the last and try to be fair to the school, the students, and the teachers.

Simply stated, the following policy was proposed:

1. Teachers of courses ending in a required state exam would use code grades for students who failed. A course failing grade of 55 percent (the highest failing grade possible in this district) would indicate that the teacher felt that this child had tried to do well—had attended regularly, had turned in assignments, had participated in class—but did not meet the requirements for passing. Such a grade indicated that the teacher was giving permission for this grade to be changed to a 65 percent (the lowest passing grade) if the student passed the required examination. Any lower failing grade indicated that the student had not tried—had not attended regularly and/or turned in assignments and/or participated. In this case, the course grade could not be changed.
2. At the time the state examination had two passing grades: 55 percent was a “local pass” and applied to the “local diploma”; 65 percent or higher was a “Regents pass” and could be applied to a “Regents diploma.” It is not a principal's role to question the intent or intelligence of the policy makers, but to enforce policy and design school policy that follows from it. So, a student who earned a 65 percent or higher on the exam could have two failing 55 percent grades from previous courses leading up to this exam changed to passing 65 percent course grades; a student who earned a local passing grade of 55 percent to 64 percent could have one grade changed to passing.
3. Students who passed the exam with a minimum grade of 55 percent but who had failing course grades under 55 percent could be given an independent study project to make up for only one such course. Successful completion of the project, supervised by an assistant principal or a teacher designated by the assistant principal, would allow the student to receive *credit by project* for the assignment. This is an important distinction: The failing grade would not be removed or changed and would remain as part of the student's GPA. The permanent record



would record credit awarded by project completion for the class failed, but no grade that could improve the GPA.

The committee discussed this draft for an entire semester. Subject area supervisors brought the draft to their teachers at staff meetings. Despite all the groundwork laid, this was a new concept and it took time for people to talk it out. In the end, it was accepted because it gave the classroom teachers control over much of the policy. The committee also added word-age stressing the importance of classroom instruction and the need for students to attend summer school to make up for failed classes. Guidance counselors were charged with stressing this to students.

Ms. Rivera never did a formal study of the impact of this policy; however, it is certain that each year scores of students graduated on time because of its implementation. Underlying this policy was her personal belief that it sometimes takes students time to adjust to the high school level.

It is not unusual for students to do poorly their first and even their second years and then wake up and perform well as upperclassman—only to find that they are stymied on the road to their diplomas by their mis-spent youth. The same will be true when students move from elementary to middle school and from high school to college. How a school handles these transition years is a key to its ultimate success.

This is a bigger issue requiring more than a policy statement on granting credit by examination. This book's companion title, *Remembering What's Important: Priorities of School Leadership* (Rowman & Littlefield), explores it in greater depth.

Let's look more closely at how you speak with members of a committee to get your ducks in a row. You have already seen how Ms. Rivera spoke with members of the committee to gather their ideas on the proposal of granting course credit for passing exams. She actually went beyond this and spoke to many other staff members as well.

Earlier in her career, as an assistant principal, Ms. Rivera came to know the teachers she had supervised in her social studies department. All were professionals and all had their strengths as teachers. But there were a handful that she came to regard as "sounding boards." She highly respected their opinions on pedagogical matters; knew that these opinions would be honest and reflect the thinking of the entire department; and

was sure that whatever subject she broached with them would be kept confidential.

All assistant principals need such sounding boards. Whenever they have an idea that they think will be good for their department, they need to speak one-on-one with their sounding boards. Most of the time, they will find that this gives them ways to improve the idea or positively present it. However, on some occasions, they will find that their sounding boards feel the idea is just dumb and will not be accepted. If this is the case, the assistant principal should either scrap the idea entirely or table it for the future, after he has taken the time to lay the groundwork for it properly.

As a principal, Ms. Rivera expanded her number of sounding boards. When she spoke with them about the credit for passing exams concept, they saw the positives for the students and school, but felt there would be significant staff opposition. It was because of these sounding boards that she made an extra effort to cite and maintain the importance of the teacher in classroom instruction. Therefore, the draft presented already took into account the opposition it would face.

All school leaders need sounding boards. They are a major part of laying the groundwork. They will help a school leader decide when an idea should be proposed or even if should be proposed at all.

A not uncommon issue in schools is how to determine who may participate in extracurricular activities. If a student is failing classes, should he be permitted to be on the student council? To star in the school production of *Bye Bye Birdie*? To be on the yearbook staff? Principal Thelen's experience with participation in the school fashion show will give you some ideas as to how you can handle this issue.

The culmination of the school year at his academic-vocational high school was the annual fashion show. All vocational departments were involved: The senior fashion art students created the sketches for designs; the senior fashion design students created the patterns and made the garments; the senior merchandising students helped with publicity, sales, and so forth.

The show was presented three times. The first was for invited members of the apparel industry, including all members of the industry advisory board, industry supporters of the school, and their friends and business associates. All staff members were also invited to this show, which featured catered refreshments funded by the advisory board. The other shows were

for the general public. The garments were modeled by the students. The fashion show director, assisted by fashion design staff, selected the models who would be in the show based on their poise, presence, and ability to walk in high heels without tripping off the runway.

During the weeks prior to the end-of-May show, models had to participate in rehearsals, sometimes held during the school day, causing them to miss some classes. Mr. Thelen addressed this issue in his second year as principal, putting some strictures on rehearsals and as much as possible limiting them to the student lunch periods and time slots before and after regularly scheduled classes.

Lost instructional time was further reduced by creating a modeling/physical education class for the students selected for the show, jointly taught by a physical education teacher and the fashion show director. While this course's original purpose was to put some rehearsal time into a regular class, it proved to have far more important applications as the student-models were taught aerobics, dance steps, and, most important of all in this age of eating disorders, good nutritional habits.

Nonetheless, during the final two weeks before the show, when full dress rehearsals were needed, some students missed some classes. This upset teachers. What upset them even more was seeing students who were failing their classes or who had had disciplinary issues, strolling down the runway to the acclamation of the audience. Mr. Thelen's sounding boards came to him about this. The staff, they said, felt that giving these students starring roles in a major school event was inherently unfair.

The issue was brought to his Academic Affairs Committee. One member, Mr. Gray, was coach of the varsity basketball team. By district policy, all varsity team members had to meet strict requirements to stay on the team and even participate in each game. Any school violating these rules could forfeit individual games or even lose varsity status for its teams. Therefore, teachers coaching such teams paid careful attention to student grades, attendance, and demeanor.

Mr. Thelen discussed this matter with Mr. Gray before the committee meeting. He felt that Mr. Gray's proposal would be easily accepted by teachers, students, and parents because it made use of a well thought out district policy designed to stress the importance of academic achievement and good behavior. Students participating in all cocurricular or after-curricular activities (including the fashion show) would be subject to the

same regulations as students participating on varsity teams. So, a student who did not meet the requirements in any given marking period could be suspended from the activity, just as an athlete could be suspended from a particular game or from a team for a designated period of time.

Opposition came from an unexpected source: the guidance counselors. They made the point that after-school activities were the main reason some students came to school. Such activities permitted struggling students to succeed in nonacademic areas, enhancing their self-esteem and providing them with a way to shine. This was a good argument.

In the end, a compromise was reached. Models for the fashion show would be held to the same participation policy as athletes for varsity teams. At first this created problems for the fashion show directors, as garments designed to fit one model had to be refitted on another after the original model was asked to leave the modeling "team." Over time, this problem was reduced as the directors made sure the models understood that continued participation would depend on their attendance, demeanor, and success in the classroom. They also checked the dean's record and report cards of those applying to be models. Checking report cards every marking period became a part of their routine.

Other after-school activities had no such strictures imposed. However, the moderators of all such activities were asked to check student report cards each marking period and advise students not doing well that the activity was secondary to their success in their classes: It made no sense to participate if he or she were not passing classes. Moderators were asked to refer such students to the guidance counselors for special help.

In the future, Principal Thelen included a guidance counselor as a sounding board.

Of course, a principal's major sounding boards are his department chairs or assistant principals. They implement policies, so they must be in agreement whenever a new policy is promulgated. The principal's door is always open to these coleaders of the school and the principal must always pay careful attention to what they say.

Keep in mind that each chairperson wants everything she can get for her department, so each has her own priorities, often at odds with other cabinet members. For example, the chair of guidance is by definition an advocate for children and the needs of the individual child. The head of

security is by definition an advocate for school safety and the needs of the many taking priority over the needs of the one. It is easy to see why these too could be at loggerheads. Chapter 3 provides a description of how a supervisory staff meeting was used to resolve issues among these department heads to reach consensus.

Filling key positions in a school is another aspect of getting one's ducks in a row. Every school has certain staff members with the skill and expertise to perform functions that keep the school operating. These may include the deans, who maintain order in the school; the programmers, who make sure all students are in their proper classes; a coordinator of student activities, who serves as a liaison with the student council and plans events for students, such as dances, charitable fund drives, school trips, and graduation; a coordinator of attendance, who follows up on students absent from school; a technology coordinator, who maintains and upgrades computers and peripherals; a director of admissions, who recruits students and then eases them and their parents in the transition to a new school (this latter is most frequently found in specialty or magnet type schools).

Newly assigned principals usually find that these staff members, the underlying bureaucracy of any school, do their jobs well. Not yet being fully aware of the realities of life, they may assume they will continue in these jobs as long as they are principals. The first time someone requests to go back to the classroom full-time or announces a retirement, they may be taken by surprise—and then have to scramble to find a replacement. Of course, this replacement while well meaning and talented will need time to learn what the veteran knew, and as a result, the school will run less efficiently in this area for some time.

After this happened to Principal Niles-Perry in her Los Angeles grade 7–12 school, she began to line up her replacement “ducks” and looked for ways to provide them pretraining. Her work with her program office provides an example.

Almost from the beginning, the program office did more than program. During the crunch times of August, September, December, January, and June (her school reorganized each semester), the two programmers were fully engaged with the correct programming of students, classes, and teachers. In between, they met with Ms. Niles-Perry and the assistant principals, made projections and preliminary plans, and also provided various staff members with data reports available through the district's computer

system. Over time, a new position of testing coordinator was added, as the tracking of student progress on standardized tests became more and more complicated and important. This staff member also had crunch times with some lulls in between.

Ms. Niles-Perry merged these two offices into one office of data management. The three staff members learned what each other did. If one left, for any reason, two experienced staff members would be left to train the new addition and little efficiency would be lost. A school leader will find that she may use a similar strategy for any office that has more than one staff member assigned to it, such as a typical dean's office. The veterans will be there to train the neophytes.

However, some key responsibilities reside in one-person offices. For such offices, the school leader needs to identify a possible replacement. She can use her knowledge of current staff and her discussions with new staff in her new teacher workshops to do this. The school leader also needs to pay careful attention to those currently in positions and encourage each to let her know if he or she has to leave. Informal talks on her walks around the school will be useful for doing this.

When the school leader becomes aware someone is leaving a position, she should try to create a situation where a new person could receive some pretraining or, at the very least, where the outgoing veteran could provide some training once the new person takes over. In some cases, she may be able to use school funds. In New York City, per-session monies pay the veteran an hourly stipend to do this. (Note: For the sake of brevity, the myriad contractual issues involved with the assignment of teachers to such nonteaching jobs are not being discussed.)

Some such positions involve secretarial staff. In every school, a key secretarial position is that of the payroll secretary. This is a difficult job requiring knowledge of budget codes, salary steps and differentials, procedures for absences, leaves of absence, sabbaticals, and so on. When Ms. Niles-Perry's payroll secretary told her that she was going to retire in one year, Principal Niles-Perry added a secretarial position to the budget so the secretary could train her replacement during her final year. Even after the veteran retired, Principal Niles-Perry was able to have her work one or two days a week on a part-time basis to help the new person during her first full year.

The longer you serve as principal, the better you will get at lining up staff members as replacements for key positions, ensuring the smooth

running of the school. Of course, your key instructional leaders are your assistant principals. How to prepare for their replacements—and your own—is discussed in *Remembering What's Important: Priorities of School Leadership*.

Setting the tone for the school year early is another way school leaders lay the groundwork. A teacher sets the tone for the entire year by what he or she does the first day and the first week of instruction. School leaders set the tone for the entire year by the groundwork they lay in September. In different sections of this book, the September jobs of a school leader are described in a variety of contexts. Here is a summary of the tasks undertaken to set the tone for the school year.

- Earlier in this chapter is a description of planning for the first SLT meeting, setting the tone and agenda for the remainder of the year.
- Likewise, there is a description of how the composition of other school committees could be determined.
- At the opening day staff meeting, give credit to as many staff members as possible for their fine work the previous year, noting any relevant statistics. Review new district initiatives and add school-specific initiatives for the new school year (e.g., The First Ten Minutes or Summing It Up or Call a Parent a Day). Stress the importance of the first day and the first week and advise that all staff teach a great lesson on the first day of classes.
- Work with the program office to ensure that program changes are minimal. Mr. Chen paid per-session overtime to programmers to work over the summer to revise programs based on summer school results. Then, he made sure that changes that needed to be made were completed within the first five days of classes. All academic departments made use of “uniform plans” for these five days.
- Meet with your security team to target incoming students who cut class, come late, or engage in any untoward activity. Have even the most minor infraction lead to a call home and possible parent conference. Send a message to new students who are testing the school that rules are strictly enforced.
- Spend the first hour of each day outside the school, greeting students, parents, and teachers—and teaching students to respect the property of your neighbors.

- Visit new students in one of their recitation classes to teach a lesson on the importance of doing well during this crucial transition year, following up on your first day auditorium presentation with these incoming students.
- Visit final year students in one of their classes to teach a lesson on the graduation policy and what the students need to do to move on to the next level.
- Informally observe all new teachers on the first day; formally observe them during the first week. Formally observe all other probationers during the first month. Be sure to have all observation reports completed by the next morning.
- When not outside the school, teaching classes, observing classes, and holding observation conferences, try to be around the school as much as possible, visible to staff and students and visiting all offices to make sure everyone is getting off to a good start.

Of course, all this will be in addition to all your regular duties, such as the required paperwork and the completion of required district reports. As there is no time before or during the school day to complete these tasks, you will have to do them at the end of the school day. You will get home late in September. But this work lays the groundwork for making the rest of the school year easier for yourself, your staff, and your students.

There is no downside to this principle of school leadership, provided you approach laying the groundwork with an open mind. Yes, you will have a final policy in mind. However, the time you invest speaking with committee members and sounding boards is not intended to be a confirmation of your ideas, but a way for you to determine their feasibility, to rethink and revise them, to learn how to best present them. Those you talk to should see some of their ideas reflected in the final document produced—and, of course, you will give them credit for their input and ideas.





## *Chapter Nine*

# **Maximize the Positives; Minimize the Negatives**

Let's start by saying that all of us have our strengths and weaknesses as people, as teachers, as school leaders. If we are to succeed in our jobs, we need to maximize what our staff members do well and minimize what they do poorly. Likewise, we must look introspectively at ourselves and do the same with our own talents and weaknesses.

School leaders need to look at every staff member, especially those who may be weak in some aspects of their jobs. By looking hard enough, the school leader will find strengths even among the weakest. Having skills in maximizing these strengths and minimizing the weaknesses in their assignments and tasks will help to improve instruction and overall school ambience.

Shortly after Mr. Thelen became an assistant principal, a teacher transferred into the English Department under the seniority transfer provisions of the teachers' contract. Before teaching several years on the high school level, Mr. Rust had been a college instructor.

The first formal observation revealed that Mr. Rust had a scholar's grasp of his subject matter, but he also had a college instructor's tendency to lecture and dominate a lesson. At the post-observation conference, he admitted that he was aware of this tendency and promised to try to work on it. He promised this for the entire time Mr. Thelen was his assistant principal and principal, but he met with little success. However, Mr. Rust had strengths that made him valuable to his department and later to the entire school.

First, he was very affable and made friends easily with other department members. He quickly became the department's party planner for

special days (e.g., the day before the winter recess) and events (e.g., retirements, marriages, etc.). He was a factor in building department camaraderie and morale.

Second, Mr. Rust was very organized. He became the book manager for the department. He kept the book rooms organized and kept careful track of the distribution and collection of texts and paperbacks—an immense task in an English department—and he did this during his prep period and by donating his own time during other free periods. When the department was given a new book room, consensus was that it should be named after Mr. Rust.

Third, he was a good teacher to assign to graduating seniors who had already passed the required state exit exam. His style of teaching would prepare students for what to expect in college—lecture. He also tended to have a soft heart and passed almost everyone in his senior classes. This was a great advantage for students suffering from senioritis.

Another school leader might have seen only the negative aspect of his instruction and decided to seek an unsatisfactory rating. To Mr. Thelen, the positives outweighed the negatives. Good department morale will lead to better overall instruction. Good control over book ordering, storage, and distribution makes the teachers' lives easier, allowing them to concentrate on lesson planning and instruction, not on worrying about what books will be available. His was the stereotypic professorial type, so his style of teaching would prepare students for college. Finally, is it so bad to reward students scheduled for graduation with a teacher who will almost surely pass them?

Years later, Mr. Rust took on the difficult task of hall dean and fulfilled this function very well. His affable manner helped him defuse situations and maintain the positive ambience of the school.

All supervisors must remember that the process to remove an unsatisfactory teacher, despite all the confidentiality requirements, is very public in the rumor mill we call a school. Somehow, every teacher knows when one of their peers is being observed more frequently than usual, a sure sign that the procedure for supporting a negative rating is operational. When the teacher involved is seen as incompetent by his peers, when his relations with his colleagues are strained, when he has not helped the department or school in other ways, the members of the department will see the school leader as rightly doing his or her job.

However, if the teacher is respected and liked, the school leader will be seen as unfair and maybe even capricious. While ensuring competent instruction is paramount, it is the foolish school leader who ignores public opinion. By finding the teacher's strength and exploiting it, and then working with the teacher to minimize negative impact on instruction, this can be avoided.

The observation process is explored in much great detail in *Remembering What's Important: Priorities of School Leadership*.

Teachers often have skills needed by a school that are unrelated to teaching. Sometimes taking a teacher out of a classroom to do other duties is detrimental if she is a master teacher. However, sometimes problematic teachers have other skills that greatly improve the school for all.

Mr. Pfizer had such a teacher in his middle school. Ms. Cerise was a computer expert at a time when few people even used computers. She could keep the newly installed computer classrooms operational. She could order hardware needed to upgrade and software that would have the most use. She could write grants to obtain more materials. She would impress the techies at district meetings so the school could get even more computer rooms and equipment.

On the downside, her interpersonal skills were not the best. If a student or staff member asked her a question, the response was usually a techie-talk lecture. She became upset if her listener didn't understand what she was saying.

Given Ms. Cerise's talents, Mr. Pfizer needed to minimize these negatives. He officially made Ms. Cerise the computer coordinator of his school. She was given a program of all computer classes, some with students learning architectural and design programs needed for elective courses and others with students who were themselves techies. Some of these techie students became her monitors and assisted in the maintenance and upgrading of the computer rooms. When Mr. Pfizer visited other schools and saw computer rooms not being used because the school was waiting forever for the district's contracted repair people, he learned just how valuable Ms. Cerise was for this position.

Sometimes a school leader needs to take an excellent teacher out of the classroom because her other talents are even more valuable to the students and the school. Ms. Magenta had a prior career in the business world. She

maintained many ties with her former colleagues and used these ties to help the school find supporters in the business community.

The industry mentoring program she began in Ms. Rivera's suburban high school was a great asset for its students. Such programs are commonplace now, but thirty years ago they were cutting edge. Her Adopt-a-Student program paired at-risk students with mentors from the business world. This was not just a simple "show the kid around the office" type of program.

Because she knew the business community well, Ms. Magenta created a program with a mission, objectives, and requirements for both the students and the mentors. There was a specified number of meetings and telephone contacts. There were special kickoff events, end-of-year celebrations, and award ceremonies.

The business mentors, many of whom were in executive positions, met and spoke with their assigned students on a regular basis. Many came to parent-teacher conferences with their students' parents. Many contributed to a scholarship fund to help exemplary students in the program with future college costs. Some stayed as mentors to the students through their college years and into their careers. There is no way to measure how many students did not drop out of high school because of Ms. Magenta's program. Instruction in the business department was diminished because she taught three classes instead of five. But, because of her, the students most in need of help had a much better chance of succeeding in school and in life. In this case, Ms. Rivera had no negatives to minimize, only positives to maximize.

Ms. Rivera's chair of mathematics and science, Mr. Silver, was often remiss in the completion of his observation reports. No matter how many reminders Ms. Rivera sent, verbal and written, he was always far behind. Every semester Ms. Rivera did much of his work, personally completing many of the required observations on his teachers. Mr. Silver had other talents that compensated for this and made him a valuable member of her administrative staff.

First, he was very good at training new math and science teachers. He would stop in to see them almost every day. He would talk with them about their instruction. He would personally address many of their classroom disciplinary problems. While he was remiss in the formal observation process,

he devoted a great deal of time to the improvement of teaching and learning through informal observations. As a result, students did extremely well on the required state exit examinations in math and science.

Second, Mr. Silver was a mentor to lost students. In any school, large or small, some students fall through the cracks. If individual staff members do not target students such as these, they will be lost to the school, to society, to themselves. This supervisor found such students when he handled discipline problems for his teachers. He made them his monitors during their lunch periods. He spoke to them about their school day, their teachers, their dreams. He often called their parents to keep tabs on them. He interceded with their teachers on their behalf when they had problems. When necessary, he referred them for counseling. He was a major factor in encouraging these students to stay in school and graduate.

Third, he liked to spend much of his time out and around the school (instead of sitting and writing observation reports). In addition to visiting and speaking with his teachers, he would find students in the halls and stairways when they should be elsewhere. He acted as an extra dean in encouraging them to get to their classes; some became his monitors, as mentioned previously.

Finally, Mr. Silver was an excellent advisor and sounding board. He had been in the school many years before Ms. Rivera was assigned there. Prior to serving as a department supervisor, he had been a teacher and then an attendance coordinator. He knew how to correctly project student enrollment so that Ms. Rivera could create a sound budget. He knew the history of the school and which past policies had failed and succeeded.

At meetings, formal and informal, Mr. Silver was the voice of caution, always able to pinpoint the weaknesses of a plan or the pitfalls of a proposed policy. He was often able to help Ms. Rivera refine her ideas before they were formally presented, helping her to achieve consensus. At meetings, he would defuse disagreements by reminding everyone that the good of the students was the common goal of all.

As individual staff members have strengths and weaknesses, so do school leaders. The key is to recognize what we do well and exploit this and to admit our deficiencies and compensate for them.

Many principals described in this book are strong on organization, able to devise administrative procedures that worked efficiently and saved

time. They are also experts at developing staff, particularly new teachers. Because they save time spent on administrivia, they have more time to devote to improving instruction.

Some, as Mr. Thelen, also had deficiencies, but he was able to compensate for them by using the talents of other members of his administrative staff, as those of Mr. Flint, his head of security.

While all principals are, by virtue of position, authority figures, some are more so than others to the students in the school. Mr. Thelen was less so. A true authoritarian is not concerned with the reasons behind an inappropriate action, whether it's a fight among students, a disrespectful remark to a teacher, or thievery of some sort. The true authoritarian only sees the action and then imposes the prescribed penalty. As such, he evokes a certain amount of fear, for any student sent to him knows for certain that the letter of the law will be imposed. Ironically, most students understand and accept this. Students are usually the first to complain if a teacher or administrator makes an exception for a student. This does not fit their sense of fairness.

Mr. Thelen was not a true authoritarian. However, an incident from his own high school days taught him the importance of a school having a true authoritarian, the person every student wants to avoid.

Mr. Thelen went to a parochial high school in the 1960s where corporal punishment was permitted but rarely used. It rarely had to be because no student wanted to test the system. On the first day of classes, all incoming freshman had an orientation in the auditorium. One of the presenters was the dean of students, a certain Mr. Ambrose.

Mr. Ambrose began by informing Mr. Thelen and the other freshmen that they could do anything they wanted over the next four years—cut class, leave early, smoke a cigarette. At this point, they were feeling quite happy, as all of them had been led to believe that discipline was going to be strict, to say the least. But just as this thought popped into their heads, they heard Mr. Ambrose say the frightening word *if*: “If you can stay in the ring with me for three minutes.”

At this point, he held up a pair of boxing gloves and the boxing trophy he won while in the military. It should be added that Mr. Ambrose was an imposing figure, well over six feet tall. When no one took up his offer, he simply stated that he expected that everyone would strictly adhere to all the school rules so that he would never see anyone in his office, where the

boxing gloves would be hanging up ready for use. The threat was enough to ensure compliance.

Many years later as an educator, Mr. Thelen remembered the importance for a school to have an authoritarian figure, the one person no student ever wanted to see. At his high school, this was Mr. Flint, assistant principal of security. Instead of having boxing gloves, he read the penal code to students. Instead of having an athletic trophy, he had the youth officers from the local precinct speak to certain students about the possible legal penalties for their transgressions. He always contacted parents. He dangled the threat of transfer to another school.

He often suffered from Dean's Syndrome, but as he was not the final authority, students and parents could see the principal to resolve matters (see chapter 2). Every principal needs to find the true authoritarian in his school and then use him or her as such. It will prevent a multitude of potential discipline issues and give the principal more time to devote to instructional matters.

Lest the reader come away with a false impression of this authority figure, it must be added that much of Mr. Flint's *modus operandi* included humor. One time he was interviewing two students who had been involved in a "he said, she said" altercation. They were each explaining themselves, contradicting themselves and one another, and telling obvious lies. Mr. Flint listened patiently. Then, he stood up, walked over to a small mirror attached to a locker just in back of his desk, and proceeded to spend one minute looking at himself. The students stared at him and one another, wondering what was going on. Suddenly, Mr. Flint turned and faced the students and said, "Do I look stupid? I don't think I look stupid, but you must think I do. Why do you think I look so stupid?" After a minute or so, the two students, not realizing this was all an act, told the truth about the incident.

The stories of Mr. Flint's various acts are now part of the legends of the school. Mr. Thelen knew that underneath his gruff exterior was a caring professional who often took the most difficult students under his wing and, working with their parents and teachers, helped them turn it around and graduate.

A principal relies on assistant principals and key staff members. He can try to commit the multitude of applicable laws and regulations to memory, but why do this if there are others who can handle 99 percent of the issues



involving such laws and regulations and provide trustworthy advice on the other 1 percent.

An example concerns all the laws and regulations regarding students with special needs (or students with disabilities or, to use the old terminology, special education students). Ms. Niles-Perry's supervisor of special education knew the laws and regulations by heart and enforced them within the school. She could answer the principal's questions and provide correct information to help her prepare for a meeting with a parent or student or visitor. In a similar way, her supervisor of guidance services was aware of all the applicable regulations and acted on Ms. Niles-Perry's behalf in all those meetings appropriate to her position.

Every supervisor should be an expert in his or her area so that the principal does not have to be. The principal needs to be aware of what these assistants do and how they do it so he can better determine how their work fits into the mosaic of the school. But he will not know everything each of them knows, nor does he want to.

Sometimes, a school leader is at loggerheads with the school's union representative. However, this union representative is another key person and advisor in the school. By respecting his opinions and involving him in appropriate matters, the principal can also bring him into the mosaic of the school.

Ms. Valletta sometimes relied on the help of her union representative. Three of the four representatives she worked with while principal were professionals who wanted what was best for the school and its students, as well as for the staff. There were certain issues they could deal with better than she. Many were teacher-to-teacher disagreements.

What is an assistant principal or principal to do when one teacher complains about another? Minor issues, such as "He leaves the classroom a mess and doesn't erase the board," are easily handled through conversations on common courtesy. Others, such as "Mr. Melon told his students that Ms. Peach is a bad teacher," are not so easy to handle informally. In cases as the latter, Ms. Valletta would speak to the union representative. If administration were to officially get involved, a letter of reprimand for unprofessional conduct might result and the cause would be one union member's complaint against another's. However, if the union representative intervened and resolved the matter, then the specter of one teacher "ratting" on another would be avoided. This was better for the school, the teachers, and the union.

What are your strengths as a school leader? A school leader must have self-awareness to make better use of his talents and the talents of his staff. Mr. Thelen's strength was instructional leadership. By having competent professionals on the staff serving as the first buffer on a multitude of other issues, he was able to concentrate on this strength. Of course, whatever the school leader's talents, the stickiest issues will still come to him in the end, but these will be the winnowed chaff of many others resolved at a lower level. Instead of intervening and resolving every issue, he will only have to deal with the most difficult.

There is no downside to this principle. Every staff member wants to find his niche, the area in which he can excel. By maximizing his pluses and minimizing his minuses, you help him find the niche in which he can achieve job satisfaction. Likewise, by exploiting what you do well and finding ways to compensate for those areas where you lack talent or expertise, you make yourself a more effective leader.



## *Chapter Ten*

# **Monitor the Communication**

The original title of this chapter was “Control the Communication,” but that sounded a bit too autocratic; however, given the scrutiny under which schools and principals now operate, perhaps it would have been more accurate. The principal’s office generates hundreds of documents each year: reports, memos, letters, and bulletins. Each assistant principal’s office adds scores more, including curriculum materials. Other offices, from the dean’s office (disciplinary and hearing reports) to the admissions office (public relations materials, letters to schools) to the Student Organization office (flyers on field trips, graduation, prom), add more documents. Then there are the official school publications: the school newspaper, the yearbook, the literary magazine, the school play or concert or sing or fashion show program.

Any of these items could include inappropriate or overly controversial content or embarrassing usage and spelling errors that could lead to the principal being called on the carpet by her superiors or an exposé by the ravenous press looking for yet another way to lambaste the schools. Is it any wonder that principals want to monitor the communication?

There are several strategies a school leader may employ to ensure that communications intended for both the internal school community and the wider world are appropriate and relatively free of errors.

First, the school leader needs to change his personal writing style for all school communications. In general, the longer the document, the greater the possibility it will be misunderstood, likewise, the greater the likelihood he will miss some writing errors. The same can be said about the

use of adjectives and compound and complex sentences. So, he should try to write like Hemingway. Keep sentences short and simple. Use bullets instead of paragraphs. Be terse and to the point. Use short words: the fewer syllables, the better. Appendix B is a sample of a weekly bulletin from the second week of the school year. You can judge for yourself if these stylistic rules were adhered to.

Let's look more closely at the weekly bulletin, a common practice in most schools. When Ms. Hildebrand first became a middle school principal, she continued the practice of her predecessor. The bulletin was a one-page listing of the special events scheduled during each day of the week. It consisted only of items like those at the top of page 1 in the sample provided in appendix B. In addition to being a waste of paper, she realized she was missing an opportunity to communicate important information to staff on a weekly basis. She expanded the bulletin to include items of policy, reminders to read pertinent items in the *Teacher Handbook*, kudos for staff, and so forth.

For two years, Ms. Hildebrand spent an hour or so each Thursday composing this bulletin for the next week before realizing that many items were repeated year to year. The school year is cyclic. What is important the first week of 2011 will be important the first week of 2012. By saving each bulletin in a weekly bulletin document folder, going from week 1 to week 40, Ms. Hildebrand could revise and update the previous year's bulletins instead of totally rewriting them.

In her third year, she further refined this method: New items were listed first with recurring items following, so that experienced teachers could easily locate new policies and procedures. The content of the bulletins became a supplement to the *Teacher Handbook* previously issued to all staff. Later, she added different types of items, such as nonfiction books of interest. A staff expects the principal to be a scholar as well as an administrator.

Ms. Hildebrand soon found that other administrators and teachers wanted items included in the weekly bulletin. At first, she just added these. Later, all such items had to be submitted to her secretary by Wednesday of the previous week, allowing them to be reviewed for appropriateness before they were incorporated into this official school bulletin. Some, such as those submitted by the supervisor of guidance services, were standard and became part of the bulletin repeated every year. Some were frivolous

and really did not belong in an official bulletin. These items she returned to the staff members with reasons for their “rejection.”

The sample high school weekly bulletin reproduced in appendix B is longer than most. During the first weeks of any school year, many reminders need to be included. As the weeks go by, bulletins should get shorter. A reasonable goal is never to exceed the front and back of an  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 14$  flyer.

Here and elsewhere, this book mentions the *Teacher Handbook*. If a school does not have such a handbook, then a first priority should be to create one. In schools lacking such a document, lengthy memos go out to teachers every year about subjects ranging from school rules to staff attendance procedures to the referral process to school district regulations to proctoring procedures. Little or nothing changes from year to year, so trees are being unnecessarily destroyed. In addition, these memos are stuffed in teacher mailboxes, and there is no check as to whether or not the teacher receives them, let alone reads them.

For newly assigned Principal Thelen, what began as a booklet to consolidate all these memos evolved into a handbook that incorporated good teaching practices, words of wisdom from the Parent Association, and even summaries of current educational research on learning modalities and alternative assessments. For the “first edition” all the various assistant principals, other key personnel, and the union representative were asked what they felt belonged in a handbook for teachers. As different chapters were written, Principal Thelen sent drafts to appropriate school personnel to obtain their ideas for revision and refinement. These were included in the final document.

At the first faculty conference the next September, he gave each teacher a three-ring binder containing this handbook. All who contributed to the content were acknowledged. Teachers signed a verification form that they had received and understood that they were required to be aware of the content of this handbook. Principal Thelen devoted part of the faculty conference to familiarizing the staff with its content and highlighting what rules, regulations, and procedures they were expected to know and implement.

The binder could also be used to hold attendance and grading records as well as lesson plans, so that the handbook contents could be referenced at any time. As soon as it was distributed, he received more ideas for revisions and other items for inclusion. Since the handbook was in a

three-ring binder, revised sections could be added and the old material discarded; new sections easily could be added. Over time, after many changes, he created a completely new second edition. Just before his retirement, Principal Thelen created a third edition so his successor would begin with an up-to-date teacher handbook.

By this third edition, almost everything a teacher needed to know (even the history of the school) was included in his *Teacher Handbook*, still a living and changing document. Mr. Thelen's weekly bulletin, instead of including pages of information on recurrent items, referred teachers to the appropriate pages in the handbook to be read at certain times during the semester.

The school leader who discovers his school needs such a handbook should also follow Mr. Thelen's example and write it himself. Staff members, the Parent Association, students, and the district will contribute ideas and information, but the principal should write the final version to make it an organic whole, stylistically consistent. This is a theme that you will see repeated elsewhere in this chapter. However many hands go into the creation of a document, it is important that one person write the final product. Documents written by committee rarely have internal consistency and often have contradictions inadvertently incorporated. These problems are eliminated when one person writes the final draft. With most documents, this person should be the principal or his most trusted assistant.

Of course, even if a school leader publishes a *Teacher Handbook* and a series of well-designed weekly bulletins, he will still sometimes need to issue a stand-alone memo. No handbook could cover every situation that arises. Sometimes, a topic will concern only a few teachers rather than the entire staff.

After attending his first senior prom as principal, Mr. Chen saw that there were several issues that had to be addressed in future years. As is common practice, prom sites provide free meals for the chaperones, whose presence serves to prevent untoward incidents. At Principal Chen's Brooklyn school, graduating seniors were asked which staff members they wanted as chaperones and these staff members were invited to attend. In addition, the senior advisor invited staff members who had volunteered during the school year to chaperone other student activities, such as school dances. The principal and assistant principals were also invited. Staff members could bring their significant others as additional adult chaperones.

Serving as a chaperone for the senior prom was seen as a type of reward for past service, for one was able to attend a fancy dress party in a prime Manhattan location with excellent catering facilities. There were two problems. Some staff members who indicated they would attend, did not. Those who did come often congregated together at chaperone tables instead of moving around the room monitoring shadowy niches and the dance floor. As a result, the next year Mr. Chen sent a memo to the chaperones about a week before the prom (see figure 10.1).

Of course, he and his wife had to be role models at the prom and themselves supervise students. Mr. Chen usually spent the first part of the evening at the entry area to the prom to make sure only his students and their invited guests were admitted (photo IDs were required). Unobtrusively,

To: [Names of prom chaperones]

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for volunteering to chaperone the senior prom. This is a very special evening for our seniors, and your vigilance will help make it a safe and secure one.

The prom is on Saturday, June \_\_ at the \_\_\_\_\_ Hotel, Broadway and \_\_ Street, 5th floor. It will begin at 8:00 p.m. and end at 1:00 a.m. Sunday morning. Please try to arrive by 7:30 p.m. If you are driving, allow extra time because the traffic in this area at this time is horrendous. You are expected to remain until 1:00 a.m. or until all the students have safely left the premises.

On the reverse of this letter is a copy of the assignment sheet sent to you by the senior advisor. *Once the students enter the reception hall, all of us are assigned to supervision of the hall.* This means moving around as much as possible and making sure that all is going well. While we want to enjoy the prom ourselves and speak with students we know, our main responsibility is making sure the experience is a safe one for our students.

Finally, we are required to have a chaperone/student ratio. Having made a commitment as a chaperone, it is necessary that you be there so that we have this required ratio. This is a commitment on your part.

Thank you for your dedication to our students. I look forward to chaperoning the prom with you.

Sincerely,  
[Signature]  
S. Chen, Principal

**Figure 10.1. Memo to Prom Chaperones**



all entry chaperones were also looking for students who might be trying to bring contraband items, alcoholic beverages, into the hall. Mrs. Chen was often on the dance floor with female staff members as the Modesty Patrol (her term). Their job was to ensure that dancing did not become overly erotic and that an appropriate distance between partners was maintained.

Once the school leader has finished the *Teacher Handbook*, he should begin working on a handbook for students, using the same strategies for content inclusion. It should introduce the school to incoming students. Aside from the mandatory school regulations, it should include a floor plan of the school, with the location of key offices, information on transportation to and from the school, graduation requirements in each subject area, study tips, research paper format, and so on.

Today, several companies sell yearly school calendar/planners that include such information, sometimes created to the school's specification. If the school or district or students can afford the yearly cost of this calendar, it is a good investment, allowing the school leader to update items every year.

Most principals do not have the resources for this. Principal Thelen was able to convince his business advisory board to fund a student handbook. Copies were printed in bulk at a cost of about one dollar each. Once a student was issued one, she used it for her entire time in the school. Enough were initially printed to provide all students and staff members with a copy and to cover the needs of incoming students for the next four years. After this, Mr. Thelen and his staff developed and printed the revised *Student Handbook*. This handbook was used as the orientation guide for incoming students, the first unit of instruction in their ninth-year English classes.

In early childhood and elementary schools, publishing a *Parent Handbook* would be more appropriate than a *Student Handbook*. For middle and high schools, it is not necessary, especially if students are required to bring their handbooks home and share them with their parents. A signed parent verification form brought back to the school will encourage students to do this. Principals can also use other methods for communicating with parents. Many find that mailing home a parent newsletter several times a year is helpful. At Mr. Thelen's school, a business supporter, this time a corporate foundation, provided funding for postage. More and

more businesses and corporations are seeking to work with schools as a community service activity. Finding corporate partners helps a school fund a number of initiatives.

Mr. Thelen mailed the first newsletter in late August just before school began. Others followed in late November, March, and June. As with the weekly bulletin, certain bits of information needed to be repeated at the same time each year, so each newsletter was composed once and then updated and revised each year. He invited the Parent Association to contribute articles and consulted with its officers as to what information parents would want to have each year. Different issues included information on school services, regulations governing working papers, the school calendar, graduation requirements, and so on. An example of an article to appear in such a newsletter is included in appendix C.

After several incidents with students, Mr. Thelen added an article to the first newsletter on the importance of parents providing their children with a “student emergency pack.” This included a two-ride MetroCard (should they lose their transportation pass), five dollars, and a listing of emergency phone numbers, including their parents’ or guardians’ work numbers (he had found that most students did not even know where their parents work). Other experiences with students led to added contents for this pack in future revisions.

In late November, just before the winter recess (Christmas vacation), he included an article on the state regulation on acceptable reasons for students to be excused from school—leaving early on vacation was not one of them. The third newsletter explained the district regulation concerning which students were permitted to march at the graduation ceremony. The final issue was the “highlights” of the school year (more on this later). A school leader who writes such newsletters will incorporate information appropriate to his district and state.

While different staff and Parent Association members could contribute articles, Principal Thelen wrote the final version. He also had trusted staff members translate the main articles into Spanish and Chinese to make newsletters accessible to most parents.

Chapter 6 covers the principle of school leadership called “Let Your People Fly.” School leaders should not micromanage the writing and distribution of memos and letters from chairpersons and other school offices.

He should ask to be sent copies of all such communications. There are two exceptions to this advice.

First, a school leader should make it a policy to review any negative communication by a department supervisor, such as an unsatisfactory lesson observation or letter of reprimand, before it is sent to a staff member. In most school districts, such communications are likely to be grieved under contractual provisions so that the supervisor and principal will have to defend their content.

In the heat of the moment, supervisors may put something into writing that more appropriately could be handled as a professional conversation. Sometimes, supervisors are too quick to negatively rate a lesson. (*Remembering What's Important: Priorities of School Leadership*, the companion to this book, suggests that school leaders should never rate a lesson unsatisfactory unless they plan to rate the teacher as unsatisfactory and seek his or her dismissal.)

If, on the other hand, the negative document is necessary, the school leader needs to review it to ensure it is correctly written so that it survives the scrutiny of the grievance process.

Sometimes, the review of such a document will lead to a conversation with the supervisor that will result in a program of intense training for the teacher rather than the process of an unsatisfactory rating. It may also lead to a personalized workshop for the supervisor on correctly writing an observation report or letter of reprimand.

Second, if a school leader finds that past communications written by any staff member were faulty—that is, they were unclear or contained too many violations of standard written English—he should have the staff member send him copies of future communications for review prior to distribution. Such a request will usually result in improved proofreading on the part of the staff member.

A school leader must also exert self-control when reviewing the work others do for him. There is a reason he is the principal or the assistant principal or the chairperson and others are not. He has a higher level of expertise and tact. He knows the importance of a polished product. His job includes writing multiple documents every day.

In almost every case, the school leader will look at what someone else has written and know he could write it better. He needs to restrain himself. What message does he send to others if every document they create

is rewritten? A staff member might say to himself, “Why did I bother? He’ll only rewrite it anyway.” Principal Pfizer used what he called his “80 percent rule.” If the document completed was 80 percent of what he would have done, he accepted it. Of course, he or his secretary would correct spelling and grammatical errors; however, he would ignore stylistic issues, such as wordiness, less-than-perfect organization, and even an inconsequential inaccuracy. If he didn’t do this, he would lessen the self-esteem of the staff member and be seen as the dreaded micromanager.

A major area of concern for all principals is the content of school publications. There have been court cases dealing with this concern. Here are some simple principles a school leader should remember:

- Have trusted and competent faculty members serve as advisors to school publications. They should discuss the purposes of each publication with students so they understand their responsibilities toward their classmates, their school, and their parents, as well as their own rights.
- The principal or a trusted staff member should review newspaper, magazine, and yearbook materials prior to publication.
- A principal does not violate a student’s first amendment rights in making revisions to these publications as long as his changes are related to appropriate pedagogical concerns.
- A principal may prohibit the publication of obscene, violent, or racist material.
- A principal may not prohibit an opinion that contains criticism of the school.

The bottom line is that reasonable censorship is the prerogative of the principal. However, a better way to handle such issues is to avoid them by making sure students understand what does and does not belong in a school publication.

Ms. Niles-Perry was fortunate to have excellent publications advisors during her tenure as principal: One was adviser to both the school newspaper and the literary magazine; the other handled the yearbook. They were role models of how publications advisors should work with students, helping them to understand their audiences (including parents and school officials), the need for balance in all articles, and, most important of all,

how their particular publication was a representation of their school to the outside world. They were helped because her school had a good ambience. Students, in general, enjoyed their six years there. There was not much of what could be called student discontent. This ambience, the teaching expertise of these advisors, and the advisors' trustworthiness relieved her of worries about school publications.

The newspaper advisor at Ms. Niles-Perry's school fully understood that a school newspaper traditionally exists to highlight the successes of students and to discuss issues of relevance to the student population. It is also read by parents who use it to better understand the school. It is used by the school for public relations purposes.

This does not mean that controversy should be avoided. Three articles in particular should be cited here as examples. One dealt with teenage pregnancy and presented differing viewpoints on sex education, abstinence, and abortion. Another dealt with date rape. A third explored the danger of abusive relationships. In all cases, the identities of students interviewed and quoted were protected. The reporting was balanced, with articles representing different viewpoints on the issues. Finally, the articles provided students with information, such as a list of available resources and support services, important for them to make personal decisions that could affect their future lives.

A knowledgeable volunteer donated his time and services to help the students create the school newspaper. As a reporter himself and frequent contributor to a major Los Angeles newspaper, he was able to help teach students the art of balanced reporting.

The advisor followed a similar procedure with the school literary magazine, although here the issue was with erotic content and hinged on the fine distinction between art and obscenity, an issue still not fully defined for adults let alone teenagers. Reminding students of their audience—their friends and classmates, their teachers, and often their parents—was a major way of addressing this issue. It was of great pride to the school and its students that the literary magazine of this inner-city middle school/high school often received high scores from the National Council of Teachers of English. So, the gentle censorship imposed did not negatively affect its quality.

The tact used with the yearbook staff was a bit different. The main question posed to them was, "Will the book we produce remind graduates

of their high school experience five years from now, ten, fifteen, twenty?" In other words, the advisor impressed on students the importance of the yearbook as a memory album, and their responsibility as recorders and keepers of these memories.

The only problem encountered concerned the use of witty captions under candid photographs of staff and students, a standard part of any yearbook. Two teachers expressed their displeasure with either the photograph used and/or the caption provided. Neither pursued the matter after a promise to establish a policy to prevent such a problem in the future.

Thereafter, the yearbook staff was required to get the written permission of staff and students for such candid photographs and/or captions. This was not a problem since most staff members were good sports and flattered that the students had picked up on an idiosyncrasy or favorite expression. Of course, no such permission was needed for the ordinary student, club, and faculty photos expected in any yearbook.

Sometimes having such excellent advisors can spoil a principal. During Ms. Niles-Perry's last year as principal, she had a new yearbook advisor. She was a fine teacher and Ms. Niles-Perry was lax, being busy with personal chores, including buying a home, preparing for her second career, and planning the weddings of her two children.

Because the advisor was new, somehow several pages in the yearbook galleys were not proofread and there were glaring usage errors on several pages of the publication, most notably in Ms. Niles-Perry's message to the graduates, her final farewell to the school as well as the class. Moral of the story: When a school leader has a new publication advisor, she needs to be on her guard regardless of other responsibilities and distractions.

The school leader will review other school publications. One is usually the program for the annual school concert or sing or musical or fashion show. As this will be distributed to special guests of the school as well as to friends and families of the students, the leader needs to proof the document to reduce the chance of glaring grammatical or spelling errors. He also wants to be sure that all staff members and students who contributed to this event are given credit.

An important item developed by many principals is a "highlights" document that celebrates the successes of the school, its students, and its staff. Whatever a school leader decides to call this document, it is important to publish one at the end of each school year to celebrate the school. It

acts as a counter to the bad news that often makes its way into the general media. It is a useful addition to the school's PR packet for the next school year. See appendix D for a sample of a "highlights" publication from a New York City school.

Previously, the school leader was advised to volunteer to write the meeting summaries of the school's leadership team to be sure they are clear and concise and provide the outcome of discussions rather than descriptions of disagreements along the way to consensus. A school leader should handle the summaries of all meetings he attends—cabinet meetings, supervisory staff development meetings, academic or vocational affairs committee meetings, Parent Association meetings, and union consultation meetings—in the same way. As long as he is factual and deals with conclusions and decisions, he will rarely receive complaints. In most cases, he can count on the fact that few people want to take notes, prepare the summary of a meeting for review, revise the summary, and then prepare copies for distribution. So everyone will be pleased when he volunteers. Once again, the school leader will be controlling the communication.

At one time or another, every school is visited by auditors, quality review teams, district personnel, and state certification teams. First impressions often determine how such reviewers respond to and rate the school. All such visitors should be greeted at the door by members of a trained student team, who guide them through the sign-in procedures, bring them to the principal's office, and answer any questions they have along the way.

Breakfast or lunch should be ready for them in this office, as well as a PR folder that includes recent school newspaper issues, a copy of the literary magazine, the highlights of the previous school year, any recent articles on the school from other publications, and the latest school statistics.

After the good impression made by the students, a PR folder gives the reviewers a fairly good sketch of the school. The savvy principal will also find that by adding a knick-knack left over from a Teacher Appreciation Day—a pen with the school logo, a school T-shirt, and so on—the visitors approach the remainder of their day with a positive attitude. If this principal also has all the items they need to review in organized folders, he can be fairly certain that the school will have a good review. When a school leader monitors communications well, he can safely use them as necessary.

The only real downside to this principle is the amount of time you must devote to it. As you might guess, writing the summary of every meeting can be time-consuming. However, it becomes easier the longer you do it. If you complete the summary right after each meeting or as soon as possible thereafter, you will be both fast and accurate. You can also train your assistant principals to help you, having them review documents prepared by staff members they supervise. A competent and well-trained secretary is also a godsend in this matter, as she will root out every misspelling and grammatical error she sees. All the time you devote to these tasks saves you time in the long run, for poor communications always leads to problems difficult to solve.





## *Chapter Eleven*

# **Remember the Support Staff**

In all books such as this, there is a tendency to stress the work of the teaching staff and administration. This ignores a good portion of the people whose hard work help make a school work well for students, parents, and staff. This chapter is devoted to the other members of a school staff who usually play second fiddle to the teachers and school leaders.

Guidance counselors are part of the professional staff of a school. Often, the work they do goes unnoticed, so they may be seen as peripheral to the smooth running of a school. When the inevitable budget cuts come, they are often the first to go (along with art and music teachers).

When Mr. Thelen was a teacher at a comprehensive high school, he had some excellent experiences working with the guidance staff. The assistant principal of pupil personnel services, Ms. Lavender, was a tireless advocate for focusing on the needs of individual students in a school with a population of nearly seven thousand. She set up a referral system so teachers could obtain guidance support for students they felt needed help. Counselors were always working with students, parents, and teachers to help each child succeed and not get lost in such a large school. The guidance counselors were respected members of the staff, providing critical services to students in need.

When he moved on to a medium-sized academic-vocational school as an assistant principal, Mr. Thelen found a different situation. There were only two guidance counselors. Many guidance functions were handled by teachers relieved from teaching duties for one or two periods. These teachers were called grade advisors and were responsible for student

programming. One teacher was titled the college counselor, nominally responsible for helping students with the college application process. However, his real job was correcting all prior programming errors, making sure all seniors had the right classes to graduate, and then convincing senior teachers to give students passing grades when June rolled around.

The two certified guidance counselors primarily worked with students in crisis. When teachers made referrals, they usually did not receive any feedback, not even a short note saying that the student referred had been seen (with a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:1,000, this is understandable). Teachers walking by the guidance suite sometimes saw no students in the counselors' offices and counselors reading newspapers.

The principal, Mr. Brown, thought of counselors as necessary (because they were required by state regulation) evils. His opinion of counselors as slackers was reinforced by the attitudes of the counselors and filtered down to the staff. There was little Mr. Thelen could do as a newly assigned assistant principal to change this situation. Ten years later, as principal, he knew he had to act if students were to receive the support they needed.

A first priority as principal was to improve guidance services. He did a budget analysis and found that by eliminating grade advisors, two counselors could be added at little cost. The counselors would now be responsible for all student advising, including programming. This makes sense since counselors are responsible for the well-being of the entire child, including academic progress.

This change was made during a fiscal crisis in New York City that reduced funding to the schools, leading to teacher layoffs, many offset by a pension buyout. Mr. Thelen knew it was critical for him to mount a campaign with the cabinet and staff to stress the importance of counselors to the overall well-being of students and the ambience of the school. There was no opposition from the Parent Association, which immediately liked the idea of halving the student-counselor ratio.

Early in September, the principal met with the counselors—the two returning and the two newly hired—to stress that their continuing as counselors in the school depended on how well they fulfilled their function. Three could be eliminated as state regulations required that a school have just one guidance counselor. Together, they established the following guidelines:

- Counselors would always respond to teachers who referred students. Understanding the confidentiality issues involved, this could simply be a form response: “The student you referred [name] was seen by me on [date]. If you have any further issues with this student, please contact me immediately.” The counselor could add other information, such as “The student’s parent was contacted and will be meeting with me,” if she so wanted.
- The organization of counseling services would switch from one of grade counselor (a counselor for the ninth year, tenth year, etc.) to one of omnibus counseling. Each counselor would follow a class from arrival in the school to graduation, taking full responsibility for the students from acceptance to graduation. This would add accountability, improve the accuracy of student programs, and allow counselors to get to know each student for his or her entire high school career. This was phased in over a four-year period.
- In addition to working with their own caseloads, each counselor would conduct small groups for students with similar issues. Thus, a counselor who had expertise helping students deal with grief would conduct sessions for students dealing with the loss of loved ones; another counselor would work with students exhibiting signs of eating disorders; another would work with students dealing with issues of abuse from a family member or boy- or girlfriend.
- Counselors would move outside their offices into classrooms for whole-class counseling sessions. In this way, classroom teachers would see what counselors did. Counselors could convey basic information in an efficient way and remind students that they would be seeing each of them at least once each semester.
- Counselor-conducted workshops would become a regular part of staff development days, allowing each counselor to train staff in an area in which she had expertise and helping staff to see when they needed to refer students for counselor support. Through these counselor-facilitated workshops, the teachers would gain a respect for what counselors did and learn a great deal about the issues their students faced: peer pressure, parental neglect and abuse, eating disorders, depression and suicide, and grieving.
- Counselors would become featured presenters at selected Parent Association meetings. The first meeting of each year, for example, would

target the parents of incoming students. The counselor for this class would make a presentation on how parents could help students deal with the transition from middle to high school.

- Finally, counselors would post their schedules on their office doors so all staff could see they were working the full day, except for a lunch period when they could relax and read a newspaper.

Counselors and the teachers began to work together. Students had greater access to support services. As teachers became more adept at spotting potential student problems, counselors could work with students to prevent problems from reaching the crisis stage. School ambience improved. Over time, Principal Thelen added a fifth counselor, whose full-time job was college counseling, beginning with classroom sessions in the sophomore year. As budgets improved, class sizes were reduced, leading to an overall reduction in enrollment (as more classes were reduced to twenty-five from thirty-four, the number of students the school could accommodate decreased). He soon had a 325:1 student-to-counselor ratio.

Along with all the preceding came the training of new counselors. Mr. Thelen had no counseling background so most of this was left to the assistant principal of pupil personnel services and the experienced counselors. However, new counselors were expected to attend the new teacher workshops he conducted. Prior to the mid-1980s, almost all guidance counselors began as classroom teachers. As the requirements for counseling certification become more stringent, fewer classroom teachers chose this as the next step in their careers. More and more, counselors were graduates of guidance certification programs and had never worked as classroom teachers. Counselors are, by definition, advocates for children; however, counselors who have never been in a classroom do not understand the pressures of dealing with five classes and over 125 students a day.

New counselors needed to hear what new teachers faced so they could empathize with teachers as well as students. They also could help train new staff by providing insights into adolescent psychology that went beyond the one or two undergraduate courses most teachers were required to take.

Mr. Thelen also made it a practice to observe counselors, just as he observed teachers. Many school leaders with no guidance background are reluctant to do this, particularly as one-on-one counseling sessions

have an aura of confidentiality. Mr. Thelen made use of alternatives. He observed whole-class counseling sessions. Not having been teachers, counselors needed his expertise with “lesson planning” and management issues. With the permission of the students involved, he also observed small-group sessions for students facing similar issues. Finally, there is no confidentiality involved when observing a counseling session to help a student determine her program for the coming school year.

Principal Thelen found he also needed to deal with the inherent conflict between security personnel and the guidance staff. On the surface, the responsibilities of each are diametrically opposed. Security’s responsibility is to make sure the school runs well for students and staff and to mete out the prescribed punishment to any student who disrupts the classroom or the school. Guidance’s responsibility is to advocate for each child and help integrate each into the fabric of the school. The former saw the latter as mollycoddlers; the latter saw the former as nothing less than agents of a police state. Principal Thelen brought both sides together and found they could agree to the following:

- If the security staff, the deans, and the assistant principal of security saw that a student referred for disciplinary reasons had underlying issues, this student would be referred to her counselor for follow-up advisement.
- If the guidance staff saw that a student referred did not really have underlying issues but was basically in need of some discipline, they would send the student to the dean’s office.
- A student’s guidance counselor would be invited by the deans to participate in meetings with students’ parents and in suspension hearings.

Over time, the two entities began to see that each was the flip side of a coin. In truth, both tried to help the individual student and the school but used techniques appropriate to their different roles.

Another important segment of the school community is the secretarial staff. One of Ms. Valletta’s first new teacher workshops had as a topic, “Who are the most important persons in the school for a new teacher?” School leaders take note: The principal is not at the top of this list. This slot belongs to the principal’s secretary—for a prospective teacher would never have even seen the principal for an interview had he not passed her

muster. Another is the payroll secretary, for without him teachers will not be properly paid, move up salary steps, or have the right health insurance or pension plan.

It is difficult to overestimate how important secretaries are to the smooth administration of a school. In addition to screening potential teachers, the principal's secretary serves as an office manager, monitors the principal's calendar, makes sure required reports are submitted on time, and handles a variety of other chores, from initial screening of school rentals to keeping track of graduation awards. Other secretaries handle important aspects of school administration: student records and transcript requests, ordering all supplies from different funding sources, and managing the pupil personnel office for the head of the guidance department.

Without secretaries, teachers would not be paid or have any books or supplies, students and parents would have no access to student records, and school administrators would spend a huge portion of their time on record-keeping. In short, the school would run poorly, if at all.

Secretaries are often the first to greet parents, students, and teachers in the offices assigned to them. Their tactful dispositions and helpful manners contribute to the positive ambience of the school. Often, an extraordinary secretary goes beyond her job description to provide extra help for staff.

Ms. Glass was the payroll secretary at Ms. Valletta's Manhattan High. In addition to being extremely knowledgeable in all payroll matters and completing all required forms and reports correctly and on time, she served as a surrogate grandmother to many young teachers who, alone in the city, needed guidance in everything from personal finances to matters of the heart. Whenever a staff member was facing a crisis of some sort, she usually knew. If she felt the principal or assistant principal could help, she would let one of them know.

When Mr. Chen became a principal, he found that his secretary was invaluable in garnering information on his staff. In most schools, secretaries eat lunch together and use the opportunity to share information. Among secretaries, as among the cloistered monks in Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, information is a prized possession. The exchange of information is a daily ritual, where one's status rises or falls depending upon who knows what about whom.

As residents in all key school offices, the secretaries know virtually everything about everybody, both what is true and what is rumored. It

was not unusual for Mr. Chen's secretary to return from lunch with the comment, "I know something you don't know." If he didn't know the new tidbit of information, she knew her status was enhanced. Mr. Chen was amazed at how much of what he considered confidential information about staff members was common knowledge. He was also eager to hear the rumor mill buzz about his recent actions and decisions. In addition to serving the needs of the entire school, secretaries are also the repository of the most current information on its inhabitants.

Today, the nationwide trend is to go to smaller, more family-like schools. This may provide students with a more comfortable atmosphere, but it also creates problems. Most such schools have only one secretary, who cannot possibly do all the work required for office management, payroll, supplies, and records. Many of these tasks will either not be done or fall upon other staff members, including teachers and administrators, taking time away from pedagogical matters. This is a disadvantage of small schools.

The New York City school district and most districts around the nation define paraprofessionals as teaching assistants who provide instructional services to students under the general supervision of a certified teacher. The paraprofessional position is intended to be a stepping-stone to becoming a teacher. Most districts provide incentives for paraprofessionals, including release time from their regular duties to attend college classes and significant tuition rebates.

In his Brooklyn school, Mr. Chen found that few paraprofessionals went on to become teachers. Most tended to be older women who worked in Title I supplemental classes. They relieved teachers of numerous clerical duties and worked one-on-one with some students, assisting them with reading, writing, or mathematics. They had no desire to become teachers. The union contract included longevity increases for paraprofessionals who served more than fifteen years, a clear indication that the majority of paraprofessionals did not advance to teaching positions.

These women working in supplemental classes were motherly (or grandmotherly) figures for students who had the most deficiencies in reading and writing. They provided one-on-one support. They helped improve the ambience of the classroom, but their academic support was limited by their own lack of education, usually a high school diploma.



Mr. Chen did not consider paraprofessionals to be indispensable members of his staff. He did not use regular school funds to pay their salaries. At the time he was principal, Title I regulations stipulated that students in supplemental classes were entitled to the services of paraprofessionals, so Title I funds were used to comply with this regulation.

Students with disabilities were (and still are) entitled to paraprofessional support, but this type of paraprofessional is not designated as an “educational paraprofessional” and often provides a range of services for students with disabilities, as designated by the students’ individual educational plans.

Any school district that has educational paraprofessionals who are not seeking teaching positions is missing an opportunity for training future teachers. If these districts negotiated a contractual change for future hires to make enrollment in a teacher education program mandatory and set a time limit (say, eight years) for completion, a pool of future teachers would be created.

This same contract should stipulate that after paraprofessionals have completed a specified number of credits and taken certain designated courses, they could take on more teaching responsibilities, teaching single classes or even units, under the supervision of certified teachers. Once they completed their bachelor’s degrees, they would have a significant incentive to remain in the school system because all their years as paraprofessionals would count toward their pensions. If monies were directed to this, instead of alternative certification programs (where a high percentage of the teachers leave teaching within five years), a cadre of classroom seasoned and dedicated staff would filter into the ranks of teachers.

School aides are also key members of the staff. Unlike the paraprofessional, the school aide has no real or imagined aspiration to advance. Aides are hired to fill non-pedagogical needs to relieve the professional staff of these chores. Principal Rivera found that most aides were older people, less interested in the relatively low salary than in the excellent medical coverage the district provided and/or the schedule with holidays and summers off.

Aides fulfill two types of functions: clerical tasks requiring less critical acumen than that possessed by secretaries or security needs. In Ms. Rivera’s school, the former handled tasks such as manning the main

switchboard; handling busing arrangements for students; delivering supplies to classrooms and offices; handling the duplication of materials for administration and staff; assisting secretaries in various offices. The latter guarded school exits for which no school security guard was available, or they assisted the cafeteria deans.

Unfortunately, Ms. Rivera found that the pedagogical staff sometimes treated school aides as second-class citizens. Schools have the highest concentration of degreed people per square inch than any other profession. Unfortunately, education does not always equal manners and sometimes leads to a feeling of elitism. During Ms. Rivera's first years as a principal, she published a periodic newsletter for the staff.

When she personally witnessed how some of the professional staff treated the school aides, she wrote a lengthy article on how the school aides contributed to the needs of staff and students in the school and were important and valued members of the school community. This validated the work of the aides and reduced some of the teachers' snobbishness.

The aide who handled the duplication center in Ms. Valletta's school was proud that he was often able to give teachers the copies they needed while they waited a few minutes. The "rules" for the duplication center had been agreed to when it was established: The school aide needed a one-day turnaround time. So, any materials left one day would be ready the next day at the same time. Because he was usually so fast, teachers forgot the rules and on those few occasions when he had a heavier than usual workload and could not accommodate them immediately, they berated him. With the support of the union representative, who had agreed to the original rules, Ms. Valletta addressed this issue in the weekly bulletin. She had a large poster put up in the duplication center clearly stating the turnaround time. It was obvious to her that a teacher who could not plan for his needs one day in advance was poorly planning his lessons and blaming the duplication aide.

The aide who handled supply delivery and distribution at Ms. Valletta's school often had to deal with a similar type of issue. Teachers and administrators were equally at fault. They would see Steve in the hall and say they needed this or that right away. When he failed to bring it immediately or forgot to deliver it, they sometimes sought him out and screamed at him. They were poor adult role models.

Steve came to Ms. Valletta very upset, and rightly so, as one of his maligners was the assistant principal who supervised him. This assistant

principal, Steve, and the principal met to set up a procedure for supply requests. The staff member would fill out a request form and have it approved by his immediate supervisor or the assistant principal of organization. Steve would fill the orders as they came in. When he delivered materials, the staff member receiving them would countersign the original supply request, which in turn would be given to the assistant principal of organization who would keep it on file and use it to keep track of the flow of supplies.

There would be no more verbal requests. Of course, there were some glitches with the system at the beginning, but in a few weeks it ran well. Steve felt empowered and less flustered because he was now able to do his job without any grief.

In many school districts, dietary services are under the jurisdiction of a central office, which assigns a dietician to a school or group of schools based on enrollment and actual number of meals served. Most dieticians are dedicated professionals who care about the nutritional needs of students.

Of course, there will always complaints about food. While there have been several successful experiments to improve school food, in most places it is still institutional steam-table fare. During Ms. Hildebrand's tenure as principal, some of the cafeteria workers complained about the language students used when they were served. She asked her teachers to address this issue instructionally during the weekly "family" period. She spoke to her cafeteria security personnel to make sure at least one adult was stationed near the service area. After a few weeks, there were no further complaints. Making sure enough trained staff is available to ensure order in the cafeteria is the responsibility of every school leader and one that should be taken very seriously.

The cafeteria, where hundreds of students congregate for each of the lunch periods, is always a security concern. Ms. Hildebrand had two cafeteria deans in her Chicago school, one of which was always on duty each lunch period (both for at least two). In addition, there were several school aides assigned to assist them and school security guards patrolling the cafeteria floor during the lunch periods.

These deans and aides addressed quality-of-life issues such as reducing the din and making sure students cleaned their trays. Over several years, as part of a special project, art students created beautiful murals to turn

the drab green walls into explosions of color and creativity. All of this made the cafeteria a safer and more pleasant place for the students and the cafeteria staff.

Ms. Nguyen's dietician at her Houston elementary school wanted to be informed of special events in a timely fashion. When students were going on a field trip and needed box lunches, she asked for one week's notice because this involved her making special preparation. Every assistant principal and principal soon learns that when one listens and responds appropriately to the needs of a support staff member not under her direct supervision, he will do all possible to assist with future needs. Ms. Nguyen made sure her two assistant principals were aware of this. When a teacher asked permission for a school trip that involved special lunch arrangements, the assistant principal spoke with the school dietician immediately. By meeting the needs of others, one fulfills one's own needs.

Almost all schools have a school security force. In most schools, this force is supervised by the school district and the principal in the school. This was the case in New York City for many years. However, during Mr. Chen's tenure as principal, the school security officers became school security agents (SSAs) supervised by the New York City Police Department (NYPD). They did not report to the principal but to an assigned sergeant (the school liaison) from the local police precinct. In some schools this led to jurisdictional issues that took awhile to iron out. At Mr. Chen's Brooklyn high school, where he always maintained a good relationship with the local precinct, the transition went smoothly.

Every school leader needs a point person or liaison with the local police authorities. The assistant principal of security served as Mr. Chen's point person. He interacted almost daily with the youth officers assigned to the precinct's schools. He met with other officers outside the school at dismissal time. He attended the yearly precinct meeting and met with the captain. When the change in jurisdiction already noted came about, he recognized the need to maintain the same open communication with the school officers, now agents.

One issue that arose early concerned the reportage of school incidents. At the end of each day, the supervising security agent reported all incidents to the precinct. Mr. Chen's assistant principal of security reported incidents to the superintendent's office. The first month of the

jurisdictional switch, these two lists did not mesh. Anytime an ambulance was called to the school, the SSAs reported this as an incident, even if the problem was an illness (such as an asthma attack) or sports-related injury (such as an ankle sprain). The assistant principal of security did not report these as they were not security issues.

To prevent any recurrence of discrepancies in reportage, Mr. Chen had the assistant principal of security and the supervising SSA meet at the end of each day to make sure they were reporting the same “incidents” to their respective offices. As any ambulance call was considered an incident by NYPD, the school would also consider it an incident to report to the superintendent’s office. (This is a simplification. The city department of education [DOE] had different forms for different types of incidents, leading to confusion. It was not until the new millennium that the DOE settled on one form to be used for all incidents, security, health-related, and so on, making Mr. Chen’s and all principals’ lives easier.)

The school leader also needs to have some procedures for working with its security staff and the local authorities. In his own mind, Mr. Chen had some commonsense principles for his school to work well with the SSAs and the NYPD:

- School personnel need to respect the abilities of the SSAs. They are trained observers and know well which students are the most problematic. They watch students as they enter, homing in on those with a history of disciplinary problems. They know what they are wearing and what they carry, and could find them if they fit the description of students involved in an incident.
- The SSAs are the confidants of some students and thus the recipients of useful information. They are trained in seeing the early signs of gang activity and in discovering the latest graffiti artist. They are excellent at defusing volatile situations.
- The supervising SSA serves on the Security Committee, and he and his agents are involved in decisions relating to security matters, such as patrol assignments.
- Because of the potential for incidents in and near the lunch room, SSAs patrol this area frequently during the lunch periods.
- School policy requires that anyone renting school facilities after school hours or on weekends must bear the cost of overtime for at least two

SSAs, one to be at the door and the other to patrol the rented sections of the building. This ensures safety for the renters, protects the school plant, and provides security for any students and staff in the building for after-school activities or sporting events.

- Through the SSAs, the administration will keep the precinct informed of special dismissal times, school events (such as dances or varsity games), and important visitors (such as the superintendent) so they can provide additional police support around the school.
- Precinct youth officers and the school's liaison sergeant will be invited to attend special school activities.

Mr. Chen also wanted his administration and staff to cooperate with the police of the local precinct. This was and is controversial. Schools are considered safe havens and there are ethical issues about involving police in school matters. However, Mr. Chen followed some simple unwritten guidelines.

If a crime was committed, the police were called. There is no reason why a student should be exempt from the legal process simply because of the locale. A minor theft or a typical student fight would be handled by the deans. A major theft would be handled by the police (he once had a student report the theft of five thousand dollars; yes, drugs were involved). If a child was seriously injured by another child, the police would be called.

Sometimes, when police were called to the school, the responding officers decided the school should handle the matter. However, they understood that their presence at the dean's conference with the children and parents stressed the potential seriousness of an incident.

In other cases, the police arrested the perpetrator. A strong message is sent to the student body when they see a fellow student being taken out of the building by the police. Of course, the student's parents were called and asked to meet their child at the police station. A member of the school staff accompanied the child and stayed with him until the parent arrived.

Mr. Chen understood that such cooperation is a two-way affair. Sometimes, an officer came to Mr. Chen's office in search of a student wanted for questioning in an incident unrelated to the school. There are strict rules governing such matters. But Mr. Chen could help by calling the child's parents and informing them of the police's need to speak with their child.

The officer could be given the phone to speak directly with the parent. Rather than have the police wait outside the school to arrest the student as she left, often an accommodation was reached for parents to bring the child to the local police station that afternoon or for the police to meet the parents and child at the home or a local church. Such cooperation is better for all involved.

When Ms. Nguyen first became principal, it was a tradition at her Houston elementary school to have a Secretary Recognition Luncheon during secretaries week in April. A light lunch was provided, and Ms. Nguyen said a few words in praise of the work of her three secretaries. Over time, she expanded the invitation to include paraprofessionals, school aides, the school dietician, school security staff, and the custodial staff so that it became the School Support Staff Luncheon. This took some time from Ms. Nguyen's busy day, but it was validation for the contributions all members of the support staff made to the ambience of the school and the well-being of students. A school leader may wish to start a similar tradition if one does not already exist in her school.

There is no downside to this precept. It simply means having respect for the entire staff, not only the teachers. Everyone who works in a school building contributes to meeting the needs of the students. Everyone is a caring adult in whom a child may confide. Everyone makes the school a better place for all.

## *Chapter Twelve*

### **Mind the Details**

When Rudolph Giuliani was mayor of New York City, he started a program to reduce “quality-of-life” crimes. He used the police department to crack down the graffiti artists, stop the belligerence of squeegee men (who tried to “clean” car windows for a small fee as cars waited at red lights), and arrest fare evaders (those who jumped the subway turnstiles without paying the fare). At first, he was criticized for using police for what were more nuisance issues rather than major crimes. However, many of those arrested for these misdemeanors were found to be criminals who had evaded their parole officers or who were wanted for major crimes. Under Giuliani, crime declined precipitously in New York City.

The little things in a school have a major impact on its overall ambience, staff morale, and student achievement. As the role model, the principal has to set a high standard so that all staff pay attention to the small details. This is the theory of chaos applied to the world of the school. A student having a verbal argument outside of a classroom at the beginning of the day could lead to a free-for-all outside the school at the end of the day. A teacher who finds that she forgot her keys and cannot get into the classroom for her first period could lose her cool with a student a few periods later. Seemingly small details become big issues if not addressed.

Mr. Thelen’s first experience with minding the details occurred while a first-year teacher at a very overcrowded comprehensive high school. During a free period, he discovered that someone had set fire to a bulletin board in a corridor near the English office. The fire was already out and the only damage was a ruined display and some burned corkboard. The



guidance office suite was nearby. Ms. Lavender, assistant principal of guidance, smelled the residual smoke and came to investigate. Her first response was to ask if there was anything in the English office that could be put up on the bulletin board—immediately, before the next period began in twenty minutes. She explained that she did not want any students to see the fire’s residue during change of classes. It was important to maintain school ambience by making the bulletin board look “normal.”

Mr. Thelen quickly found materials. Ms. Lavender brought a stapler and together they created a normal if less than aesthetically perfect bulletin board in under fifteen minutes. She also notified security to be on the lookout for a pyromaniac. Ms. Lavender was minding the details, taking time from her own important job to help a first-year teacher decorate a bulletin board and hide all remnants of a case of vandalism to maintain the ambience of the school.

Bulletin boards are important as they are among the first items seen by students and visitors to the school. A school leader should ask all the teachers he supervises to decorate the bulletin boards inside their classrooms before the first parent-teacher conference day. Exemplary student work always makes for a good display.

Most schools have corridor bulletin boards and display cases. Twenty years after the incident just described, Mr. Thelen found himself principal of a school that had scores of them. He began an Adopt-a-Bulletin Board program. At the beginning of the school year, he allowed any teacher to lay claim to any corridor bulletin board or display case that was empty or contained out-of-date materials. Once claimed, it was the teacher’s responsibility to maintain up-to-date displays throughout the school year.

This plan worked very well. Some club advisors seized a bulletin board as a way to keep students up-to-date on club activities. Some teachers in nearby rooms created stunning displays related to their subject areas. The college counselor used bulletin boards outside her office to list college acceptances. The visual display teacher claimed most display cases for the work of students in his vocational classes.

In later years, the culminating project of graduating art students became the creation of permanent artistic displays outside department offices. These displays creatively illustrated each department’s subject area. Over time, such projects also provided art works for the student and teacher cafeterias as well as school lobby areas. A special program that paired art instruction

with ninth-year Global Studies led to a Lascaux-like timeline mural of pre-history and early civilizations displayed outside the history office.

It is common practice to reduce or eliminate arts programs when budgets are reduced or academic requirements increased. While principal, Mr. Thelen refused to do this. We can all learn from his example, for a school without the arts loses part of its soul. Students' talents are not nurtured, and students are deprived of their chance to shine in nonacademic areas.

Are bulletin boards worthy of the attention of already overstressed school leaders? Yes. By giving this seemingly minor detail some attention, the school leader makes his school's halls and classrooms inviting and colorful, highlighting the talents and achievements of students and creating a better ambience for all.

Just as bulletin boards are the first items visitors see, the person who answers the telephone at a school provides the first impression of the school to a parent, a student, or a district official. At Mr. Pfizer's middle school, the school aide who handled the main switchboard was most professional. She would always greet callers with a "Good morning" or "Good afternoon," and follow with "This is Midwest Middle School. How may I help you?" And then she directed calls to the appropriate office. This will be true in most schools. However, Mr. Pfizer found that those who answered the phones in other school offices were often student aides whose manners were less than perfect and whose message-taking skills were deficient.

Mr. Pfizer provided these student aides with a script to use whenever he was out of the office. As a department supervisor, Mr. Pfizer used the following: "Good morning/afternoon. You have reached the Mathematics and Science Department. Mr. Pfizer, the chairperson, is not in his office now. I am his student aide, [name]. May I take a message for him?" The aides were also provided with a message form to complete (see figure 12.1).

When he moved up to the principal's office, Mr. Pfizer expanded this practice to the entire school. He reminded staff that they are professionals when responding to telephone calls and that they are also responsible for training any others who may answer the telephone for them, whether school aides or student aides. Everyone who calls a school should expect to have a professional and caring response from those who answer the call.



Ms. Valletta in Manhattan High School had two experiences with entry procedures that illustrate the sometimes conflicting attitudes of those in authority in a school district. When her superintendent, Ms. Ebony, visited the school during Ms. Valletta's first year as principal, the school security agent recognized the superintendent immediately. The agent had her sign in but did not ask for ID. After signing in, Ms. Ebony took out her ID and reminded the agent that she had to follow the prescribed procedure, even if she recognized the visitor. Ms. Ebony later asked Ms. Valletta to follow up on this with the security staff.

Several years later, the chancellor visited the school. When he was asked for ID by this same agent, he gruffly said, "I am the chancellor—don't you recognize me?" The agent still insisted on his showing ID, which he reluctantly did. The chancellor didn't say anything about this to Ms. Valletta. After he left, the security agent came to see her, quite upset, and described the incident, fearing the chancellor would report her. Ms. Valletta assured the agent that she had followed the proper procedure and she would defend her if there were any repercussions. Ms. Valletta immediately called Ms. Ebony and explained what had happened. The superintendent fully agreed with the security agent. The chancellor did complain to Ms. Ebony and the New York Police Department. He was nicely told that the agent was only following the procedure set down in his own directives.

When a school has any special event or affair, the details become even more important. To miss one might be to invite disaster. Mr. Thelen often had special affairs at his school. One was the Career/College Day when invited representatives from various occupations and colleges came to the school. It is likely that as a school leader you may plan such a day at your school. Perhaps Principal Thelen's experiences will be useful to you.

This special day was more than a way to help students to think about their futures. Every business representative was a potential supporter of the school. Every college recruiter would leave with an impression of the school and its students that could impact on future student acceptances. When Mr. Jay, Bloomingdale's executive and chair of the school's business advisory board, proposed a Career/College Day, he had no idea of the amount of work he created for Mr. Thelen in only his second year as

principal. Because this was such an important event for the school and one that required that the planner have a total picture of what was involved, Mr. Thelen decided to handle almost all the details himself. These tasks included the following:

- Obtaining permission from the superintendent to suspend most classes this day in order to have informational sessions on careers and colleges for students.
- Creating the special schedule for the day that specified the location and topic of every presentation. This included adjusting the bell schedule for the time frame of the sessions.
- Arranging with the school dietician for quick box lunches to be served to students during special lunch periods on this day.
- Providing directions to the business presenters. The business advisory board members did an outreach to their contacts. But it was Mr. Thelen who sent each one a letter explaining the schedule for the day and providing a list of suggestions as to how to best maintain the attention of adolescents for the twenty-minute presentations.
- Providing directions to the college representatives. The college counselor reached out to her college contacts. Once they responded, the principal took over sending a form letter that explained that the college sessions would be attended by ninth- and tenth-year students, as well as eleventh and twelfth. An important purpose of this day was to make the younger students aware of what they needed to do now to be eligible for acceptance to a particular institution later.
- Working with the English Department to give students “lessons” on the organization of their day, the topics of the presentations, the preparation of intelligent questions, proper “business world” behavior in these sessions, and so on. The English teachers also gave written assignments, requiring students to attend at least four sessions, including two college presentations.
- Informing all teachers of the special schedule at least a week in advance so that they might add assignments; for example, vocational teachers required a report on at least one career-related session.
- Working with the assistant principal of organization to assign teachers to rooms where presentations would be made. It was and still is a district requirement that a licensed teacher be present with students at all

times. A plan was worked out with the union representative to do this within the parameters of the contract.

- Working with the computer coordinator to be sure presenters requiring any type of computer or audiovisual equipment would find everything ready when they arrived.
- With the help of the secretaries, ordering a catered breakfast and lunch for all presenters (the business advisory board funded this).
- Arranging to provide all presenters with a thank-you gift and a packet of materials. The admissions officer prepared PR folders on the school and Mr. Thelen ordered a small item with an expression of thanks from the school (a pen, a mouse pad, or the like), along with an invitation to the school's industry fashion show.
- Setting up hall patrols of assistant principals and teachers to keep corridors clear and move students along from one presentation to another.
- Collaborating with the coordinators of DECA (Distributive Educational Clubs of America) and VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America) to provide student greeters at the door to escort all visitors first to the principal's conference room (for breakfast) and then to their assigned rooms. These were pretrained student greeters who knew how to create a fine first impression.
- Providing presenters with a feedback form to help the school improve the event in the future.

And the list of things to do went on for Principal Thelen.

All these tasks required hundreds of hours of work for one day. But every detail was important if this affair was going to be a success for both the students and the visitors. As time went on and Mr. Thelen became more experienced, he was able to use the previous year's work as the blueprint for the next year. He felt it was worth all the time and effort because students genuinely made the most of the day, and presenters left with a positive image of the school and its students. Many presenters became regulars who came back year after year. An unanticipated result was very positive PR for the school in particular and the school system in general.

It was not unusual for a new potential presenter to call Mr. Thelen with concerns about her personal safety. Such a call indicated that this business executive had bought into the image of the public schools created by a sensational press. He assured all such callers that their fears were ground-

less and that they would find the day as rewarding for themselves as for the students. All such presenters who saw the Mr. Thelen at the end of the day were most impressed by the decorum of the students and saw public education in a new light. They did not know all the work he and his staff had done to ensure this.

Mr. Thelen also tried to ensure that all went well by having his wife help out. Most of the day, he wanted to be around the school making sure all was going well. Therefore, his wife, along with his secretaries, held the fort in the conference room as presenters came for their lunch break. Yes, the secretaries were trusted members of the staff, but his spouse provided peace of mind and added a familial dimension to the affair for the visitors. It is important for a school leader to involve his or her significant other in life of the school, a life that takes many hours away from the family. Understanding the role and responsibilities of one's spouse improves conjugal bliss.

In chapter 6 I advise school leaders to let people fly. The preceding anecdote is in direct contradiction to this principle. A school leader wants to personally mind the details of any event that affects how the outside world sees his school. A principle of school leadership implicit in this book is knowing when to follow one's principles and when to modify them to fit special situations.

There are other times when the school leader will want to mind the details herself and not delegate. The beginning of the school year when students receive their programs is such a time. If a student comes to the chair or assistant principal or principal, it probably means that he feels he has been given the counselor/programmer runaround and needs her intervention.

It was not unusual for a student to come to Ms. Niles-Perry with a program problem. Her programmers handled most issues, but they followed the guidelines that she had set down, such as no "convenience" changes: that is, no changes because a student wanted to have lunch with a friend or wanted to finish a period early. While some such changes might be legitimate, multiplied by hundreds they would disrupt the entire school program.

Ms. Niles-Perry supported this policy in 99 percent of the cases, but would personally handle the exceptions. A student who was an emancipated adult and sole support of his younger brother and sister asked to finish school early because he had to get to his job. He wanted to skip lunch (tech-

nically against the rules) and drop his supplemental math class, mandated as he had not yet passed the required exit examination in mathematics. Ms. Niles-Perry personally reprogrammed the student to meet his requests and then had the program office implement these changes. A principal creates procedures to permit the school to operate smoothly and address the needs of most of the students and staff. However, every person in the school is an individual and sometimes the principal needs to modify her own rules to provide a student or staff member with the help he needs.

A school leader will help students in myriads of other ways, such as opening a classroom after the school day for the student who left her book bag or handbag or gym clothes in the room. Minding these details is often more satisfying than many other more “important” aspects of the job, for it allows her to work with students one-on-one.

Sometimes minding the details means not handling them. Sometimes the best decision is no decision. A newly assigned school leader has a tendency is to deal with every issue right away. She wants to demonstrate that she is a leader who can handle matters in a timely fashion. She will learn that addressing some issues too quickly could mean doing work unnecessarily. Sometimes the requests from the district sent today are same ones cancelled tomorrow, and waiting a day or two before responding may save time and effort.

This also applies to issues brought by staff members. It is not unusual for a staff member to complain to the school leader about a colleague—“He hogs the desk space.” “She is dismissing her class late, and I cannot get my lesson started on time.” “He never erases the white board.” “I need to use this text, but my colleague has not yet collected copies from his class.” The school leader should listen carefully. This, in itself, will calm the teacher. She should promise to look into the issue and get back to the teacher in a day or two.

The school leader should not act on this promise immediately, for to do so will mean that she will have to tell a staff member that a colleague had complained about him to the administration. The school leader will find that in most cases, the teacher will see her again the next day to tell her not to bother. He had resolved the matter himself.

After the initial sense of indignation had worn off, the teacher spoke to the colleague as a fellow professional and resolved the problem. Teach-



ing is a difficult job. Working with children five or more hours a day is physically and emotionally draining. On those bad days, a small issue is blown out of proportion and leads to a complaint to the assistant principal or principal. When tranquility returns, so does a sense of proportion and regret over the complaint.

When the teacher tells the school leader not to bother, the leader should apologize that she had not yet gotten to the problem and was intending to do so before the end of the day. The teacher will be happy that the leader remembered the issue, and relieved that she had not done anything about it yet.

Of course, if the issue remains unresolved, the school leader will intervene, obliquely, if possible. She will speak off the record to a recognized master teacher in the department or, as previously discussed, the union representative. It is better for all parties that the matter be resolved at the teacher level. Knowing that it will go to the administration if not resolved usually encourages parties to come to agreement.

Paperwork and computer administrative work is the bane of a teacher's existence. All he wants to do is teach, but the subject area assistant principal wants a count of textbooks distributed, the assistant principal of organization wants the student ethnic survey completed, the principal wants teachers to complete the committee volunteer form, and the guidance counselors want to know when they can visit the class. Some teachers dread going to their school mailbox or e-mail inbox each day because they know that there will probably be another request.

School administrators sympathize but still need the form or report or input. Administrators know when they will need items to complete their own reports. It makes sense to ask teachers for the items well in advance, giving a "due date" a week earlier than when an item is actually needed. This allows the administrator time to send reminders and still not submit a late report. Part of minding the details is being well organized and knowing when reports have to be submitted so information can be gathered in a timely manner.

The "mosaic theory of the school" provides a good ending to this chapter. If you are in a museum or church and look at a mosaic from a distance, you are struck by its beauty. However, as you move closer to the mosaic, you begin

to see its imperfections—a tile slightly misshapen or a color not quite the right hue. You see the dings and chips of time and maybe an entire tile missing. But if you begin to back away, you again see what seems to be a perfect work of art. Up close, you may be tempted to fix the imperfections—to replace or repair the errant tiles. However, if you do so, the beauty of the original might be marred by the changes intended to improve it.

A school is like a mosaic. It is composed of students, teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, paraprofessionals, aides, security agents, cafeteria workers, custodial workers, volunteers, and school leaders. There are innumerable policies, procedures, regulations, handbooks, newsletters, and memos surrounding all these people and governing or explaining the school's workings. All of this is housed in a building with plumbing, heating, and electrical systems. A person entering a school forms an immediate impression based on the overall ambience experienced. This impression—based on a greeting received; the smiles or frowns on the faces of students; the professional or unprofessional demeanor of staff; the look of the halls, walls, and bulletin boards; and the interactions with various people in the school—is usually correct.

A principal walking through her school gathers a more informed impression, based on the instruction she sees in the classrooms she passes, the manner in which staff interacts with students and students interact with each other, the general order of the place. She knows if the school is working for her students and staff.

As Ms. Valletta made her walkabouts through the halls of Manhattan High, she always had a good feeling—the mosaic that was her school was beautiful. However, when she looked closer, she could see the imperfections: the weaknesses of a particular teacher, the decrepitude of the ancient heating system, the shortcomings of an assistant principal. She was tempted to fix myriad little things to make her school better. At this point, she remembered the mosaic. If she replaced a less-than-stellar teacher, what repercussions would this have on the rest of the department or the entire school? Would the replacement be any better? If she went all out with the powers that be to have the heating system updated, would the work involve smashing down classroom walls and disrupting instruction for many months?

The mosaic of a school is the sum of its details. A school leader must always remember that tinkering with any detail has multiple repercussions,

and she must seriously weigh the advantages of making a change against the unanticipated consequences that may follow. Perhaps, the mosaic of the school works not because each component is perfect, but because the imperfect components that we all are become perfect when working together.

## *Chapter Thirteen*

# **Stay within the Box and Remember—Life Is Unfair**

Most texts on school leadership tell aspiring school leaders to “think outside of the box.” Yes, they have to be creative, but often that “box” is composed of the regulations and procedures of the school district and state education department. If the school leader thinks outside the box, he may wind up without a job. This is especially true when you remember another adage that applies to the world of schools: *Life is unfair*. No matter how many successes a school leader has had, if he makes a mistake or does something stupid (and don’t we all at one time or another?), no one will help him. In fact, they—the superintendent, the school board, the powers that be—will throw him to the wolves.

There are some mitigating factors to this, but a school leader must remember that if he breaks through the box and his strategy doesn’t work, he is on his own. It is better for the school leader to conceive of the box as having flexible sides that he can bend without breaking and so stay within the safety of all the rules, regulations, and contractual provisions that he is, after all, charged to enforce.

Several years after becoming principal of his Brooklyn school, Mr. Chen found this out. The following is a long anecdote, but it deals with a situation that all school leaders will face at one time or another and points out the importance of following established procedures in a situation that had serious repercussions—and almost cost Mr. Chen his job.

Sometimes it is difficult to know what the box is or what is right for all people. The era of more stringent procedures for reporting allegations of sexual misconduct was just beginning in the early 1990s. The district

promulgated a new regulation on the reporting of such incidents and provided principals with a workshop on this new regulation. Some thought the regulation robbed the principal of judgment in dealing with matters within his or her school and opened the door for frivolous allegations to be taken seriously. So, even though all principals were told to report even the slightest suspicion of sexual misconduct to a central investigatory agency, some found it difficult to break old habits of investigating and handling school matters in-house.

Shortly after the workshop on the regulation, in early May, an allegation was made against a respected staff member by two students. The accusations were vague—"the teacher makes me feel uncomfortable," and no specific words or incidents were reported, even when Mr. Chen patiently prompted the students with follow-up questions.

Mr. Chen confronted the staff member, who had no prior record of any sort of incident, and the staff member denied everything and described how the accusations stemmed from the students illegally using the staff member's office phone to make long distance calls, resulting in their suspension from school and dismissal from a varsity team. The dean confirmed this. Apparently, the newly installed phone system's block on long distance calls did not work on all extensions and these students had racked up long distance bills of several hundred dollars. The dean was in the process of notifying the students' parents.

The new regulations alluded to earlier said that a principal was to report everything and not investigate allegations of sexual misconduct. Mr. Chen did not feel a case of what looked like frivolous remarks made in obvious retaliation fell under this regulation. To him, the facts seemed clear: The students were getting even for their punishment by making vague accusations.

In late June, the students' parents called the matter into the district office. Two investigators came to the school. Mr. Chen told them everything he knew. They told the principal he should have followed the new regulation and called this matter into their office, regardless of what he thought. However, they added that this seemed to be a case of retaliation against the teacher. They interviewed the teacher and promised to interview the students over the summer. If they found anything that supported the allegations, they would inform Mr. Chen. In the mean time, he was directed to do nothing until he heard from them.

The following September, Mr. Chen received no calls from the investigators. Months passed, and he thought that the matter had been settled. In April, almost a year after the original allegation, a new investigator came in and this time Mr. Chen was verbally berated for not reporting the allegation and was threatened with being brought up on charges for maintaining a cover-up.

As it turned out, the original two investigators he had spoken with the previous June had been laid off shortly after they spoke to him. For whatever reason, the students' parents waited almost a year to call the district, prompting a renewal of the investigation. The dust-covered case folder was found piled with many others on an empty desk. Mr. Chen was told that when he heard nothing from the original investigators, he should have followed up, called the investigation office, and found out what was happening. Had he done so, the case folder would not have lain dormant for months.

The staff member was removed from the building. Mr. Chen was told to say nothing. Many in the school raised questions and rumors were rampant. The other teachers in the staff member's department were upset and kept coming to their principal, as several, from whatever source, found out their colleague was facing charges of sexual misconduct. Finally, Mr. Chen called in a representative of the teachers' union to speak confidentially to the staff and tell them that their principal could not provide any information. The union was glad to do this because it understood the need for confidentiality to protect all staff members and the importance of not spreading rumors. Once the staff understood that Mr. Chen's silence meant protection for a colleague, they were better able to deal with the situation.

Yes, the investigation department had blundered, stretching out this matter for an entire year. But Mr. Chen realized that the initial blame was his. He trusted a staff member who gave a credible explanation and did not trust two suspended students who provided no proof and made vague remarks about some comments that made them feel uncomfortable. Perhaps, if he had listened more carefully, he would have detected a deeper meaning beneath these remarks. In the end, he did not follow the regulation to call in every allegation and not investigate. He knew he was to blame.

The superintendent's legal assistant accompanied Mr. Chen to hearings regarding the teacher and told him that he might be penalized for failing

to file the initial report and for failing to follow up. In his job, the assistant had seen the iniquities of the very small minority of staff members in the “rubber room” of the superintendent’s office. He told Mr. Chen that no one can ever see into the heart or head of another person and know what was going on. He added that principals had enough responsibilities—when they can report anything to others and let them take responsibility, they should just do it.

The staff member was found to have engaged in verbal misconduct. There had been no physical improprieties. The staff member was suspended for one year and then returned to service in another school. No hearing was held for Mr. Chen. The investigator recommended that the superintendent place an official letter of reprimand in Mr. Chen’s file and levy a fine for his going outside the box; neither happened.

Mr. Chen still wonders if the seven-week delay in reporting the original allegation made any difference. Would the investigators have come sooner and been able to settle the matter before the school year ended and before they had been laid off over the summer?

Many months after the hearing and teacher’s suspension, Mr. Chen heard two conflicting addendums to the story from different sources. One, a school paraprofessional who had several student aides assisting her, told Mr. Chen she was glad this staff member was removed—several student aides had told her that they felt “uncomfortable” around this teacher and that this teacher had made remarks they did not want to repeat. Mr. Chen told her that if she ever heard anything like this again about any staff member, she had to report it to him immediately.

The other story came from an honor student who worked in Mr. Chen’s office. She told him that the two students involved in the allegations had been bragging to their peers that they had “gotten even” with a teacher for suspending them.

Where is truth in all this? Mr. Chen never found out. He only knew that the personal life of the staff member was never the same, the teacher’s department was negatively affected for several years, and he sought professional advice from his own union, which had a principal’s support program.

Mr. Chen had reason to recall the words of his first assistant principal. When this assistant principal knew Mr. Chen was actively interviewing for a supervisory position, he asked him if he knew why supervisors were

paid more money than teachers. Mr. Chen gave the usual answers—greater responsibility, training staff, handling administrative matters. The assistant principal disagreed: “Bill, they pay you more because they know you will lose faith in humanity.” The assistant principal was a bit of a pessimist, but at this time in Mr. Chen’s life, he understood exactly what he had meant.

Mr. Chen’s mistake was feeling it was his responsibility to take care of matters in his own school. Wasn’t the regulation for very serious allegations? Didn’t a principal have some authority to make judgments? The whole issue of sexual misconduct did not really become clear to Mr. Chen until two years later at a principals’ retreat. After a day of meaningless workshops, several of the principals from the district retreated to a watering hole and shared experiences and stories.

Mr. Chen was aghast at the stories told by several of the female principals regarding their own high school experiences that included outright sexism, misogyny, and verbal and physical advances from both students and a small minority of staff members. No one did anything; no one even complained because they knew nothing would happen. He could appreciate the purpose of the new regulation in a historical context. The pendulum, which had been all the way toward a system of silence, had now swung all the way in the other direction. Perhaps, this is necessary until a proper balance can be struck. Needless to say, in the future, Mr. Chen called in all allegations. Fortunately, there were very few.

As you can see, this whole incident dragged on for a long time. By the time the recommendation for Mr. Chen’s misconduct came to the superintendent, three years had passed since the original allegation. There was a new superintendent. The new investigator in the case had been let go. Mr. Chen had built up credibility as an educator with the staff in the district office. All these factors combined to let him off the hook.

Mr. Chen enjoys regaling listeners with another story that provides a humorous and ironic twist when another allegation surfaced a few years later. A very upset first-year young male teacher, Mr. Blue, came to Mr. Chen to discuss an issue regarding a female student. He was visibly troubled and embarrassed as he told Mr. Chen how a student in his class had told him that another female student was spreading rumors about him and even writing letters to her friends (this student among them). Mr. Blue showed Mr. Chen the letter in which the student described how this



teacher loved her, was dating her, and was going to run off and marry her. Mr. Blue said the student was in his class, but he never spoke with her except in his role as a teacher.

The principal asked Mr. Blue if he trusted him to handle the matter correctly, and he said yes (the trust build up by the new teacher workshops cannot be underestimated). In front of the teacher, Mr. Chen called the investigations office and told them he wanted to report an allegation of sexual misconduct. As Mr. Blue squirmed in his seat, Mr. Chen gave the pertinent information requested: name of student, name of teacher, details of the allegation.

Then the investigator asked who had made the allegation. Mr. Chen replied, the teacher. There was a long moment of silence on the line and then the question, “What do you mean the teacher? He reported himself?” Mr. Chen said yes and told the investigator the story that the teacher had told him. Mr. Chen was told to investigate the matter himself. By now this had become the accepted procedure for matters that the overworked investigations office did not deem serious.

This investigation took no time at all. The student’s guidance counselor knew her as a troubled child with an active and vivid imagination that usually involved being taken out of her very bad family situation by some savior, in this case her teacher. The counselor arranged for special help for the child, Mr. Chen reported back to the investigations office, and the matter was closed. Mr. Chen and Mr. Blue knew the student’s story was a fabrication. School leaders need to remember that students of all ages sometimes have active imaginations and sometimes lie.

There are times when you can stay in the box and still do what is important and right for students. An example is the way in which Principal Thelen interpreted the mathematics requirement for a diploma. In the late 1990s, the state regulation was clear: Students had to take *three years* of mathematics and pass *one examination*, the Math A Regents. The curriculum for Math A and Math B was a twenty-year experiment in integrated mathematics—combining topics from algebra, geometry, statistics, and trigonometry—that looked good on paper but did not work in actuality. It has since been replaced by the more traditional curriculum used by the rest of the country. Each course required a three-semester sequence of study.

Many students in Principal Thelen's academic-vocational school were not very mathematical, even though they were excellent in the practical aspects of spatial recognition needed in some of their vocational courses. To help them pass the required examination without experiencing failure, Mr. Thelen and his math supervisor stretched the sides of the box. Entering students deficient in mathematical acumen, as measured by the school's own placement exam, were given a four-semester sequence, using the first semester to bring the students' math skills up to the high school level. They were also given reduced-size classes and in some cases a supplemental Title I math class. At the end of four semesters, over 80 percent of these students passed the Math A exam on their first sitting.

About fifty students did not pass. For these, they created a course called Math B Prep. On paper, it was a course to review all the concepts students needed to know to succeed in this second course in the sequence. In actuality, it was a Math A test prep course. By creative programming and course titling, they stretched the box a little further to help their students. They stayed within the letter if not the spirit of the curriculum parameters.

Principal Thelen stretched the box even further in future years. Students who needed two or more years to pass the Math A exam did not have enough semester slots left to complete the Math B curriculum and be prepared for the Math B exam. The principal and his math supervisor created the course Topics in Math B and concentrated on those topics that would help students do better on the SAT. This met a student need and at the same time included the recommended instruction, albeit sifted for particular topics.

Another way to bend the sides of the box is to provide students with ways to make up course requirements so as to reduce failures. This serves students by helping them keep on track and serves the school by improving its passing statistics. Let's look at some examples.

In many schools, physical education (PE) is a problem. No matter how many times Principal Valletta told students that they needed to pass PE to graduate (this was a topic in her orientation lesson for incoming ninth graders), students were absent from gym or came unprepared. Part of the reason was that for programming purposes, many students had PE as their first or last class. Those arriving to school late missed PE. Those wanting

to leave early were more tempted to cut a last period gym class. Coming unprepared meant that students were not properly and safely dressed for gym (sneakers, T-shirt or sweatshirt, and shorts or sweatpants).

PE is an important class. Students learn discipline and cooperation. They let off youthful energy in a positive way. In addition to the usual general calisthenics, basketball, and volleyball, students at Manhattan High School were given units in softball, yoga, and isometric exercises, and they even could opt for an elective PE course in dance. Passing was mainly a matter of attending on time, being prepared, and trying your best.

When Ms. Valletta saw that students were failing PE at a higher rate than academic subjects, she worked with the PE teachers to develop a system of “makeup” gyms. Toward the end of every semester, PE teachers were paid per session (overtime) to stay late or come in early so that students who were failing due to absence or unpreparedness could make up several sessions and thus pass the class. Recitation class PE teachers informed eligible students of this opportunity and encouraged them to attend. Many students were able to make up classes and pass.

Ms. Valletta had a similar problem with required lab classes in science. This was a sixth science class added to the student’s program that many did not take seriously as it was not taught by their regular science teacher. Many students skipped required labs. They would not be able to take the required state exam (lab attendance was required to sit for the exam) and would fail the class. She found three ways to address this problem.

First, several teachers were paid by federal grants to stay after school to supervise a peer-mediated tutoring program for students needing homework help. Their job was to organize a team of student volunteers who would tutor, match volunteers with students needing assistance, and then supervise the room while the tutoring took place. Of course, almost every day the teachers would also help tutor. One of these teachers was a science teacher. So, once or twice a week, he conducted makeup labs (the tutoring room was adjacent to a science lab).

Second, during the state testing week when there were no classes, the assistant principal of science scheduled all-day labs just before the science exams so that students could make up multiple labs and review for the test at the same time.

Third, Ms. Valletta met with her science supervisor and programming staff to create programs that allowed science teachers to teach the labs for

the students in their own recitation classes. There were timing and contractual issues involved, but in most cases the program was able to support this change. Students took the science lab more seriously and cutting was reduced. The science supervisor, working with his teachers, also made use of the flexibility permitted in the science curriculum to revamp the order and content of the labs so that they meshed better with the classroom instruction and were more interesting to students.

A complaint often heard from principals is that it is unfair to demand that students pass more and more standardized promotional examinations and at the same time expect teachers to provide students with a “real” education. These complaints are not new. When the small “themed” school movement began in New York City, many such schools were exempt from state exit exams. When the state department of education decided it was going to require all schools to meet the testing requirements, there was an uproar from the small-school principals: “Such exams are not part of our mission.” “We provide students with an education that goes far beyond what these tests require.” “Our specialized curriculum will be destroyed.”

They went outside the box to protest, obtained some parent support, and tried to overturn the plan. It was a wasted effort. A state education department is a bureaucracy responding to pressures from the state legislature for empirical evidence of student achievement. For better or worse, they believe exams provide this proof. It was a fight these principals could not win.

Mr. Thelen in his academic-vocational school could have made similar arguments. Many of the students in the vocational areas were not going on to a four-year college, yet they had an academic curriculum designed expressly for this purpose. These students neither needed nor wanted three years of math and science. When these expanded requirements were implemented during Mr. Thelen’s second year at the helm, principals of similar schools cried foul. How could the students complete their vocational sequence? Again, this fight could not be won.

Mr. Thelen knew that academics were a given, so he changed the vocational sequence to provide flexibility to those students needing more academic classes to meet graduation requirements. Students in occupational programs would take one period of vocational education in the ninth year instead of two; two periods in the tenth year instead of three; and two or three (Mr. Thelen took a three-period class and divided it into

a two-period required class and one-period optional class) in the eleventh and twelfth years. The vocational program did not suffer—students, for the most part, learned the same skills in less classroom time as teachers consolidated their instruction and paid more attention to time on task.

This is not an either-or problem. The issue can better be stated as *How can we meet our state and district testing requirements while at the same time truly educating our children?* Good teaching does both. Good planning, providing instruction in the skills students need to pass exams from the first semester of the course of study, eliminates the need for crash review courses—a waste of instructional time—just before the exam. Good teachers and good schools have students who pass the exams *and* receive a good education. As mentioned previously, when exam results are good, the powers that be will leave the school leader alone to run his instructional program on his own terms.

Life is unfair in the world of education today. School boards demand immediate results from superintendents. Superintendents demand immediate results from principals. Principals demand immediate results from assistant principals. In the not-so-distant past, school leaders had time to learn their jobs and their schools' cultures before being expected to provide significant achievement gains overnight. It takes at least two years to impact on the achievement of the students in a school. Given this time, a competent school leader can make a difference through curriculum revisions, staff training, hiring of new staff, administrative procedural changes, parental involvement, and grant support. But, the modern school leader is often put into a problematic school and given one year to obtain results. If he fails to do so, he is out of a job. Life is unfair.

The new school leader assigned to a school in need of improvement must be honest with his school community from the first day and let it know he must show significant improvement in student achievement in one year. He needs to enlist the help of all his constituencies to come up with an emergency one-year plan that will yield results quickly and a long-term plan that will make systemic changes that will improve achievement over the long haul. This is hard to do if he does not know the key players or the culture of the school. In this case, the school leader needs to find a key player he can trust and have her lead him through the maze of the school's culture and politics so he has a chance to succeed.

Life is unfair, but with the help of the school community, he may be able to level the playing field.

The only downside to following the advice of this chapter is that you really cannot think inside the box when you are convinced that your outside-the-box plan is the silver bullet for improved achievement in your school. If you are so convinced, do it. If you succeed you'll be hailed as a genius, write a book, and be called upon as a guest speaker demanding hefty fees. If you fail, you'll be back in the classroom, where, after all, you will have the professional satisfaction of helping individual students succeed. Perhaps, this is a win-win situation in favor of thinking outside the box. Or a pipe dream in a world where life is unfair.



## *Chapter Fourteen*

# **“Always Remember What’s Important”**

This book is about the principles, techniques, and strategies that create a people-oriented leadership style. All the theories and studies are meaningless if educational leaders do not put people first. In this final chapter, we will look at other ways that school leaders can put people first.

A retiring principal gave this advice to his successor: “Always remember that family is more important than school. If any staff member has a family issue, whether illness or marital issues or children/parent problems, always make allowances for them regardless of your judgment of their teaching ability.”

A principal comes to see the entire school as his extended family. Staff members will seek his advice on a myriad of non-school-related issues. This is part of a principal’s role as “head” of the school family. Whenever a staff member has a serious issue, whether with illness or child care or an aging parent, he should provide whatever help he can. This may be granting a flexible schedule, so she can arrive late or leave early, or reviewing the procedures for leaves of absence.

There is more to being the “family” head than helping people individually. As a family marks rites of passage (as birthdays, marriages, etc.), so a school needs to do the same. As a family has its own rituals and traditions, so a school needs to establish rituals and traditions. Most school districts, particularly large urban districts, are impersonal bureaucracies. They are machines in which people are cogs. Those who do wrong are removed. Those who do well are ignored. There is little or no recognition for the work of teachers. If the important work



of dedicated people is to be recognized, it must be done by individual school leaders.

The same retiring principal also told his successor never to send a teacher a letter of commendation. Such letters will come back to haunt you if you ever need to rate the teacher unsatisfactory. His successor ignored this piece of advice. She felt that everyone needed a pat on the back for doing good work. It was a rare week that several such letters were not sent to teachers for all sorts of reasons: for making a presentation at a Parent Association meeting; for teaching a demonstration lesson for a new teacher; for conducting a workshop on differentiated instruction; for helping when there was a nearby incident. Each letter took a few minutes of the principal's valuable time, but each enhanced school morale.

This same new principal encouraged her assistant principals to follow her lead. She asked them to inform her when a teacher went above and beyond the call of duty so she could send a thank-you letter. At the end of the school year, she published her version of a celebration of the school year flyer. While primarily a PR document to celebrate the success of students, it also heralded faculty successes and contributions.

At the end of the school year, this principal sent every faculty member who helped the school in ways other than teaching—from serving as deans to the club advisors—a letter thanking them for their extra time and effort.

The teachers supervised by an assistant principal or department head or grade leader are her immediate school family. Each department or grade needs to mark the rites of passage of its own teachers. A retired principal recently attended the retirement luncheon of a teacher he had supervised for twenty years. This teacher was his department's party manager, planning celebrations for marriages, births, the end of the school year, and retirements. Every department in every school needs such a teacher to help all of us to remember that we have lives beyond the school.

A principal needs to plan an end-of-year thank-you celebration for the entire staff. This could be a breakfast or luncheon on the last day of the school year. Each staff member could be given a small token of appreciation, such as a pen or a travel sewing kit, useful on a summer vacation. Such celebrations will cost little, but staff will look forward to this event. It is not the food or the gift that's important, but the recognition of their work during the past school year.

Another family-oriented tradition a principal may want to initiate is a breakfast for the top ten graduating students. One principal held this breakfast every year, and at this meal he asked these top students which staff members helped or inspired them the most. He then sent a letter to every teacher or counselor or administrator they mentioned, informing them that one of the top students had named him or her as one of their most memorable teachers or mentors. This principal also asked these students to speak with their friends and ask them, before they graduated, to thank their memorable teachers for their help.

The principal who sends home a parent newsletter can expand on this tradition. The last page of the June newsletter could include a short article asking each parent or student to send a thank-you letter to a teacher. The bottom of the page would be a tear-off template letter that the parent or student could complete and give to the teacher. The leadership of a school needs to encourage its clients—the students and parents—to show their gratitude to teachers and other staff members, who work long and hard to serve children with little external recognition.

Finally, a principal needs to recognize family members when they retire to begin the next phase of their lives. One principal had a special brunch for all his retirees before the graduation ceremony. After the meal, all were invited to join him as special guests at the graduation ceremony where they were introduced to the students and parents and given a round of applause for their years of dedicated service. All careers need closure and congratulations. A principal will find that even after he retires, he will be invited to school events and retirement celebrations where he will be expected to say a few words as the now more elder statesman.

Another principal recognized the contributions of staff by providing them with longevity pins at the end-of-year luncheon. Teachers who had served in the school for five, ten, fifteen, twenty, and more years were awarded these pins to the acclamation of their colleagues.

School leaders also need to establish school-wide rituals that become an expected part of the school year for all members of the school community. Here are some rituals various principals established at their schools, which a school leader could emulate.

In some schools, principals teach a class. As this can be difficult and sometimes a disservice to students in the class because of missed instruc-

tional days due to emergencies and meetings, principals need another way to meet with students. One middle school principal made it a practice to visit every student in a classroom setting. In September, she visited the English classes of all her new sixth-grade students, teaching a lesson on their new school: its procedures, practices, rules, support staff.

In November, the principal visited all seventh-grade math classes to teach these students a lesson on what they had to do to graduate with their class the next year. Finally, in March, she visited the social studies classes of all her eighth graders to encourage them to keep working until the end of the school year, go over the high school application process, and explain how their three years at this school had prepared them for this next level.

Other principals of elementary and high schools do something similar, making their lessons appropriate to the age and class of the students. The topics discussed are secondary to the principal's visibility and accessibility during these visits. Principals who initiate such a practice in their schools find it becomes a yearly ritual that students look forward to.

The larger your school, the sooner you as principal will have to deal with the tragedy of a student's death. An urban middle school principal had a child die during his first year as principal. The child had been at a neighborhood movie theater when a fight broke out. He was not involved and was the victim of a stray bullet. The last part of this chapter deals with the saddest rite of passage a school leader deals with, saying goodbye to those who die. This student's death, during the winter holiday season, left a permanent impression on this principal. Thereafter, on the last day of school prior to the start of the winter recess, he did a dizzying spin around the school for two or three periods, visiting every class in the school just to stop in and tell students to have a joyful, restful, and safe holiday—and to come back when the recess ended.

A more joyful ritual was begun by a high school principal. It was actually the idea of his union representative, who had transferred into the school. At an informal meeting with the principal, he described a holiday ritual in his previous school. As students arrived on the last day before the recess, they were greeted by staff members singing holiday songs (all secular, such as "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer").

The principal began this ritual in his school. The first year, there were about ten teachers singing, to the consternation of the students entering

the school. Five years later, there was a choir of fifty, a trumpeter, guitarist, and drummer. All wore Santa hats (and a few light-up red noses). The principal provided coffee and donuts for all participants. Entering students were greeted with enthusiastic if often off-key singing and were given a candy cane. Those early for a class often joined the festivities.

The last census confirms that the United States is becoming more and more multicultural. Schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas in all parts of the country now reflect this multiculturalism. In an age where pride in one's heritage is positively viewed, every group in a school wants a school-wide recognition or celebration of its heritage. This could lead to an ethnic/cultural assembly every week reducing instructional time.

One principal decided to eschew multiple celebrations of diversity and have one celebration of diversity in unity. He called this the school's Multicultural Festival, a celebration of all the students' cultural heritages, as well as their common bond as Americans. He found that his idea led to problems. The first time he had this festival, students developed acts that represented their cultures (such as salsa dancing from the Dominican Republic), but the staff was not prepared for the numbers of students who wanted to perform.

His school's first festival assembly was too long, repetitious, and featured some acts of questionable talent and a few of questionable taste. It was marred by preplanned jingoistic displays from the student audience in the auditorium as one group booed another and raised flags for acts from their own country. What was meant to celebrate unity amid diversity instead focused on differences and prejudices.

The next year, the principal and his staff planned better. English teachers taught lessons on proper auditorium decorum and respect for the cultures of others. Acts were prescreened by a team that included staff and parents, who made sure the acts were in accord with the mores of the school and local community and represented the variety of cultural heritages in the school. Dramatic and poetic readings were included along with singing and dancing. Teachers who brought their classes to the auditorium took first-line responsibility for their behavior, with visible support from all other teachers, deans, and department chairs.

This time, all went well and the festival became a yearly tradition. After some experimentation with dates, the principal settled on having it on the Wednesday afternoon before the Thanksgiving recess. What better time to

have a ritual celebrating our nation's rich variety of cultural backgrounds? The Friday before, he added a special showing for parents who were invited to bring homemade foods representative of their cultural heritage for all to share.

Of course, every school also needs to have one or more award nights to celebrate the achievement of its students to the delight of their parents. It is here that students get the "honor" pins and parents get their bumper stickers: "My child is an honor student at \_\_\_\_ school." At such celebrations, savvy principals try to include students often left out: those with perfect attendance, those who show the most improvement (even if they do not have a high average), and those in the transition years who pass all their subjects. When a principal is planning his award night ritual, he should look for ways to expand the accolades.

A school will have many other rituals: the annual school play, spring concert, fashion show, career/college night, student portfolio exhibition, art show, and the list can go on. All these rituals and events bring a school together as a family to celebrate what is important: the achievements and talents of its students.

Another aspect of focusing on what's important is helping members of the school community have this same focus. It is easy for staff, including leadership staff, to get involved in petty politics, ego trips, and power binges and to lose sight of the real focus of the school—its students. The bottom line for all educators is simple: It is not about us. It is about the students. Sounds simple, but it is not. For the school leader, it is not about power or authority, but service: service to teachers so they can do their jobs better, service to students so they can achieve and mature.

One high school principal experienced how the unimportant can interfere with what is right for students when he wanted to make 55 percent the minimum failing grade. He brought this proposal to his leadership council and presented the following rationale:

- First, a failure is a failure. The course needs to be made up by the student whether the grade is a 20 or a 55 percent.
- Second, while a failure is a failure, a 20 percent has a significantly more negative effect on the child than a 55 percent.

- Third, students gain maturity during their high school years. Many who fail in the ninth and tenth grades do very well in their eleventh and twelfth years and make up for their failures through summer school, evening school, and additional classes during the regular school year. However, the failing grade is never erased and always part of the GPA on their college applications. A child with two or three very low failing grades is doomed to a low GPA, even after making up the class and doing well in future classes.
- Fourth, the lowest grade possible, the "zero" grade for truants, is not included in the GPA (the computer system interpreted this as a class never taken, so no grade was entered). Children who actually attended faced a GPA penalty greater than those who never even came to class.

This rationale seemed logical to him, but unleashed a storm of debate. Many teachers simply did not want to give up what you could call the power to grade bash a student. Even a few students on the committee felt that students should fail with whatever they earned. There was a positive response from the guidance counselors, parents, most students, and some teachers on the committee, so it became his task as principal to convince a few students and many teachers to join the consensus.

After many behind-the-scenes one-on-one conversations, the committee settled on a compromise: Teachers could fail students with a 50 or a 55 percent. The 55 would be used for students who attended regularly and did a significant amount of work, but not enough or not of the quality to earn a passing grade. The 50 would be used for students who were frequently absent and did very little work.

A positive outcome of the debate was that the representatives of the school community spoke with their constituencies and all became aware of how students' GPAs were computed and how an awful grade in the ninth year could badly impact a student applying for college.

A related leadership council discussion involved determination of the school's valedictorian. The district required a written policy approved by this committee after lawsuits were filed based on an unclear policy in a school in another part of the state. The committee had no issue with the existing policy. The district had a system-wide GPA computation system. The school would use this system and the valedictorian would be the senior who had the highest GPA at the end of the fall semester of the senior year.

The only other proviso was a “residency requirement.” The student had to earn at least half of her credits at the school. This was intended to disqualify a transfer student who had earned the bulk of her grades in another school with another staff using different grading criteria.

A few years after this policy was agreed to, a question arose when the valedictorian was a student who entered the school as an English language learner (ELL) who had many ESL (English as a Second Language) classes during her ninth and tenth years. Some members of the committee felt that these classes were somehow easier than “regular” classes, giving ELL students an advantage. This, of course, led to other comments regarding students in honors or advanced placement classes being penalized for taking harder classes.

The principal did not feel any class should be considered more or less difficult than any other. In addition to being wrong academically, it would open up whole new areas for discussion, as making adjustments for teachers who are easier or harder markers. He was able to nip this whole discussion in the bud by doing some research on grades given over the past few years and presenting these results to the committee:

- Students who transitioned from ESL classes to general education classes maintained the same grades, which would indicate that they were not receiving higher grades in ESL classes.
- Students in honors and advanced placement classes scored marks higher than 85 percent at a significantly higher rate than students in regular classes. Therefore, it made no sense to give them an even higher weighted grade.
- Good students received good grades even in classes taught by teachers others regarded as hard markers. Without naming names, he checked the grades earned by the best students in classes taught by teachers who had reputations as hard markers.

All this showed that the top students in the school eligible for the valedictory and other graduation awards consistently maintained high grades regardless of the class or teacher. Isn't this the mark of a truly good student?

Fair grades are important to students and impact on their futures. Any discussion about adjusting grading and crediting procedures must always keep this in mind. Schools that give students in advanced classes weighted

grades have forgotten this. There is nothing more ridiculous than seeing students with GPAs of over 4.0. This casts doubt on the credibility of all the marking in the school. Gifted students are called *gifted* because they are able to achieve at a higher level and handle more challenging course work. There is no need to adjust their grades.

There is one duty that no leadership course prepares us for: saying the final goodbye to students, staff members, and school supporters by attending funerals, conducting memorial services, and delivering eulogies. Earlier in this chapter, the untimely death of a student was mentioned. He was very well liked by classmates and teachers. Grief counselors came to the school to help students and staff. The principal arranged a memorial service. He spoke with the parents, not as a principal, but as a parent, but what can one say on the loss of a child?

The Parent Teacher Association, in consultation with the principal and the child's parents, created a scholarship fund so that each year at graduation an award would be given in his name. For a while the parents came to the graduation to give this award, but, as the years passed, they declined to attend.

During the tenure of every principal, students, parents, teachers, and members of the advisory board will pass away. The better a school leader knows the deceased the more of an emotional toll this will take. One assistant principal had a student monitor suffering from juvenile leukemia. She was a smart and funny child who won the hearts of the entire school. When the student lost her battle with the disease, the assistant principal was devastated.

Helping faculty deal with the death of a colleague is a sad and critical task every school leader will face. A good principal develops a talent for remembering good and sometimes funny stories about those who have died, to stress to the staff that we remember deceased colleagues best by remembering their dedication to students and the good times we experienced with them.

I will end this chapter with part of the eulogy I gave for a colleague who died shortly after retirement. There is no more appropriate way to end this book.

"Always remember what's important." By this Howard meant several things.



First, whatever you do, make sure no one calls the *New York Post*. He took to heart Mr. Brown's admonition to "cherish obscurity." In the crazy world of the Board of Education, if you do nothing to rock the boat, the powers that be will forget you exist and you will be free to do your job—to educate children.

"Always remember what's important" also meant that what may seem important to teachers and school leaders may not be so important to children and their parents. Howard helped us to remember that their needs were more important than ours, and it is our job always to serve those needs.

"Always remember what's important." It's not the yearly fads or pedagogical jargon or extra trappings. It's simply teaching and learning, helping students on the road to their futures. Howard lived by his own words. He did not care about the trappings—little things like observation reports—but he deeply cared about teachers and children. Practically every day, he stopped in to visit most of his math and science teachers, just to see what was happening in their classes and ask if they needed any help. Frequently, he would stop in to see me to tell me about a great lesson he had just seen in Josephine's or Efraim's or Angela's or Stu's class.

Howard was the peacemaker at cabinet meetings—yes, the assistant principals often had some donnybrooks. What can you expect when Marcia and Mike were forced to sit in the same room for three hours? Whenever things got heated, Howard would intervene with a smile, a joke, and a reminder—we're all here to help the children.

His tiny office was crammed with students, usually students who would be in the dean's office if he had not adopted them. Many he found cutting class while he roamed the hallways. He brought them to his office, spoke to them, called their parents, mentored them, intervened for them with all their teachers, and helped scores of potential dropouts to graduate.

While many others, myself included, devoted time to looking at how the school as a whole could help students, Howard always remembered that the help given one-on-one to individual children was the most important.

When I retired, along with most of the other school administrators, Howard decided to remain an extra year, then two, then three—he wanted to make sure the transition to a new generation of school leaders went smoothly and he knew that he was, literally, the bridge between the past and present of the school. He realized it was important that the school remember its roots as it moved into the twenty-first century. Howard physically retired three years ago, but in his heart, he never left. Whenever we spoke, he knew everything that was going on. His school family was always on his mind.

# **Appendix A:**

## **Guidelines for Marking and Grading**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

The Academic Affairs Committee is empowered by the State Education Department to make decisions regarding all aspects of granting credit in the school. It is composed of faculty members, students and parents who volunteer their time to take part in committee deliberations. During the 1992–1993 school year, all meetings were devoted to the development of school-wide guidelines for marking and grading, including the difficult problem of how to handle makeup assignments. This chapter reproduces the guidelines developed by this committee.

Over the last few years, the District has issued Policy Statements on Marking and Grading, as well as other aspects of instruction. These are incorporated into CHAPTER 3 of this Handbook. None of the guidelines below are in conflict with those of the District; most provide concrete methods to implement them. This chapter is designed to:

- Dispel myths about grading often held by students and even some faculty members.
- Help all members of the school community understand the meaning of “cumulative grading.”
- Provide guidelines and options for makeup work.
- Familiarize faculty members with the concept of “authentic assessment”; i.e., alternative ways in which students may demonstrate mastery.

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This appendix is adapted from chapter 2 of the *Teacher Handbook* of the High School of Fashion Industries, New York City, 2002 edition.

This chapter is a delineation of official school policy, in support of the Superintendent's policies incorporated into CHAPTER 3. It is a document in process. Suggestions for improvement should be directed to the Academic Affairs Committee.

## 2.2. CUMULATIVE GRADING

### 2.2.1. Myths of Grading

If we listen to conversations in the halls and classrooms of our school, we will often hear the common misconceptions:

- The first marking period doesn't count.
- Only the third marking period counts.
- If you pass for the second marking period, you'll pass for the semester.
- Your third marking period grade will be the same as your second.
- If all you do is participate every day, you'll pass.
- If you come to class every day, you'll pass.
- If you don't show your parents your report card, it doesn't exist.
- Nothing happens during the first week of school.
- Nothing happens during the last week of school.
- If you never turn in your Delaney card, you can't fail.

When both faculty and students understand the grading process, particularly the concept of cumulative grading, all these myths are dispelled.

### 2.2.2. Cumulative Grading

Simply put, this means that report card grades reflect and include **ALL** the work done up to the closing date for a particular marking period. This sounds simple, but, unfortunately, many students find this concept hard to understand. It is important that all faculty members make this clear to their students at the beginning of every semester when the course outlines are distributed and discussed. This should be reinforced when grades for the first and second marking periods are explained. Here are three ways you can do this.

*FIRST, VERBAL DEFINITION:* Each report card grade reflects *ALL* the work done up to that date. Therefore:

- The first marking period grade includes all the work done from the first day of the semester.
- The second marking period grade includes all the work done for *BOTH* the first and second marking periods.
- The third and final marking period grade includes all the work of the *FIRST*, *SECOND* and *THIRD* marking periods—all the work done since the first day of the semester.

*SECOND, A GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION:*

GRADES INCLUDED	1st REP CARD (5 WEEKS)	2nd REP CARD (12 WEEKS)	3rd REP CARD (FINAL GRADE)
DAY 1–END OF 5 WEEKS	XXXXXXXXX		
DAY 1–END OF 12 WEEKS	XXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXX	
DAY 1–END OF THE SEMESTER	XXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXX

*Each of the report cards includes ALL the grades from the first day of the semester.*

*THIRD, TWO EXAMPLES OF HOW CUMULATIVE GRADING MAY WORK*

CRITERIA	1st MARKING PERIOD	2nd MARKING PERIOD	3rd MARKING PERIOD
HOMEWORKS COMPLETED	2 of 10	3 of 10	10 of 10
QUIZZES	Passed 0 of 7	Passed 2 of 8	Passed 8 of 10
TEST GRADES	ABS, 40	50, ABS, 62, 65	70, 73, 75, 69
PROJECTS AND REPORTS	2 assigned: none done	4 assigned: 2 not done, 60, 65	4 assigned: 70, 80, 75, 60
PARTICIPATION	Very poor	Poor	Good
GRADE FOR MARKING PERIOD	40	55	75
REPORT CARD GRADE CUMULATIVE	40	50	55

**Figure A.1. How Cumulative Grading Works: Student A**

Explanation: This student did well in the third and final marking period, but *overall* for the entire semester did poorly:

- Only 15/30 homework assignments were done (50%)
- Only 10/25 quizzes were passed (40%)
- Only 5/10 tests were passed (50%)
- Only 4/10 reports or projects were passed (40%)
- Participation for the semester was poor

NOTE: The student could have asked for a makeup assignment for the poor work done during the first and second marking periods. (See SECTION 2.3 following.)

Explanation: This student did poorly in the third and final marking period, but *overall* for the entire semester did passing work:

CRITERIA	1st MARKING PERIOD	2nd MARKING PERIOD	3rd MARKING PERIOD
HOMEWORKS COMPLETED	8 of 10	7 of 10	4 of 10
QUIZZES	Passed 5 of 7	Passed 7 of 8	Passed 6 of 10
TEST GRADES	55, 65	65, ABS, 70, 73	ABS, 45, 75, 69
PROJECTS AND REPORTS	2 assigned 70, 75	4 assigned 85, 80, 80, 75	4 assigned None Submitted
PARTICIPATION	Good	Good	Poor
GRADE FOR MARKNG PERIOD	75	80	55
REPORT CARD GRADE CUMULATIVE	75	80	65

Figure A.2. How Cumulative Grading Works: Student B

- 19/30 homework assignments were done (63%)
- 18/25 quizzes were passed (72%)
- 6/10 tests were passed (60%)
- 6/10 reports or projects were passed (60%)
- Participation for the semester was average

The above are generic examples. In different subject areas, different weight might be given to different criteria. Because passing Regents is a graduation requirement, the importance of test grades in all subject areas has increased. To help students understand your grading criteria, you might want to create your own samples for Student A and Student B and discuss them with students.

Finally, Student B illustrates the type of student who has “built up credit” with the teacher. He or she is likely to see the teacher during the third marking period to explain the circumstances behind the poorer work and to seek a project to help raise the final grade. A teacher of Student B would be very likely to speak with the student to see if there are any problems and, if appropriate, to make a referral to the guidance counselor.

### **2.2.3. Bringing the Students into the Grading Process**

Students should be fully aware of how they will be graded. This should be explained in the course outline and requirements, distributed during the first few weeks of each semester.

At the end of each marking period, students should be informed as to how their grades were computed. This can be done in several ways:

- Give each student a detailed explanation sheet
- Devote part of a lesson to an explanation
- (Preferred method) While students are working on a class assignment, meet with each individually and confidentially explain the grade—and, if necessary, what makeup work the student needs to do.

**CAUTION:** It is inappropriate to discuss any student’s grade in front of one or more classmates. A student’s grade should *NEVER* be shared with other students. If grades are posted, use student ID numbers, not names. Revealing a student’s poor grades to other students could be considered

demeaning to the student and fall under the category of verbal abuse (see CHAPTER 10: LEGAL MATTERS).

## **2.3 MAKEUP WORK**

### **2.3.1. Introduction**

Some students are afraid to approach teachers regarding makeup assignments. Some are tired of hearing “the lecture.” As teachers, we must be aware of this and it is our professional responsibility to reach out to those students who are delinquent in their work and frequently remind them of what they must do in order to pass.

### **2.3.2. Makeups for Major Reports, Projects, and Assignments**

It is our professional obligation to permit students to make up work. However, we also have an obligation to be fair to the entire class so that a student receiving a makeup is not being given any special advantage or reduced work.

#### 1. Unfair/Ineffective Methods

There is an inherent unfairness in two of the commonly used methods of permitting students to do makeup work:

- The “minus x number of points a day late” method is ineffective. If the maximum grade is still a failure, why should the student bother?
- The “accept as complete without a grade” method is unfair to the other students who turned in work on time. They have their average reduced by a poor grade while the late student has no grade averaged in.

#### 2. Preventing Late Assignments

The best way to deal with the late assignment problem is to prevent it. Here are some suggested strategies:

- Give major projects in distinct segments with due dates for each. Students will be less intimidated by these smaller steps. If one assignment is missed, it will not negate the entire project and will give the teacher

a chance to speak with the student prior to the due date for the entire project.

- Provide students with very specific instructions on a handout and conduct lessons on how to complete the report or project. These instructions should include a clear explanation of the grading criteria or rubric to be used; a statement of the instruction and help the teacher will provide students; and a clear statement of the penalties for lateness (see below).
- Teach through modeling; i.e., actually do a sample assignment or project with the class to provide a model for the students to follow.
- Use cooperative learning methodology; i.e., have students share their work in different stages so that peer assistance may take place.
- Use formative grading criteria; i.e., a report or project may be re-done for a higher grade.
- If more than one similar project or report is to be done during the semester, the first one submitted may be used as a basis for lessons on how to improve future projects or reports.
- Completed work could have an audience other than just the teacher: oral sharing of reports and/or attractive displays of student work in the classroom.

### 3. Fair Makeups

Of course some students will turn in work late regardless of all your efforts. A lateness penalty which is fair to all students could employ two procedures:

- The “minus x number of points a day” will suffice for a limited number of days and is an easy and relatively fair way to handle students who turn in work within a *FEW* days of the due date.
- For reports or projects that are more than a few days late, require makeup work that is more demanding than the original assignment to compensate for the extra time given.
- The instruction sheet for the report or project should clearly indicate the penalties for lateness *in advance*. In addition, a good policy for all major projects and reports is a tear-off at the bottom signed by the student, verifying that he/she received and understood the instruction sheet. Here is an *example* of the type of lateness penalties you might include in your instruction sheet for a 1,000 word report with three secondary sources:



**Lateness penalties:**

- o If the assignment is 1–5 days late (weekends and holidays included), -2 points for each day late.
- o If the assignment is 6 to 15 days late (weekends and holidays included), it must be 1,500 words long and include five secondary sources.
- o If the assignment is 16 to 25 days late (weekends and holidays included), it must be 2,000 words long and include eight secondary sources.
- o If the assignment is over 25 days late (weekends and holidays included), it must be 2,500 words long and include 10 secondary sources.
- o All work must be submitted on or before the last day for makeups listed in the school calendar.

**2.3.3. Makeups for Major Examinations**

Some students are legitimately absent for major examinations. However, some absent themselves due to fear or anxiety. Before discussing legitimate makeups, therefore, we should examine ways that teachers can better prepare students for major examinations to reduce anxiety and test-phobia and encourage attendance.

**1. Preparing Students for Examinations**

- Issue a “study sheet” before each major test. Include sample questions to familiarize students with the type of questions they can expect; include a detailed list of what material will be covered.
- Prior to the first major test, teach students how to write an essay. Many students know the facts but not how to organize them. This is a skill every teacher should teach every semester.
- Use cooperative learning methodology to help students review for a test. For example, create study groups with each member of the group responsible for presenting a succinct review of part of the material on the test.
- Teach students how to deal with test-phobia by reviewing good study techniques early in the semester. For example, students should be told

that an unwritten homework assignment every night is to review all their notes on a regular basis.

- Help students understand that while test grades are important, a report card grade is not based on any single test mark, but on all the work they do. In essence, students must try to establish a “good credit rating” so that one test is not crucial to the final grade. Students who do well all along rarely fail if they are legitimately absent from an examination because the teacher has enough other materials to determine a fair grade. Students who are continually remiss in attendance and assignments, however, have no “credit rating” and will find that missing a test could easily lead to failure.
- Students who qualify for special testing procedures or whose native language is not English may need special assistance. Teachers need to be aware of this and make arrangements to provide these students with help.

## 2. Legitimate Forms of Makeup for a Major Test

Teachers take a significant amount of time to create a fair and valid test with Regents-style multiple choice questions and essays. It is not appropriate for absent students to expect teachers to make up a parallel examination just for them. There are several ways to deal with absence.

- Have a system whereby the lowest examination grade in any semester is dropped. A student absent for one test, therefore, has this “0” grade dropped and no makeup is necessary.
- Delay the return of any graded examinations by a day or two. Students absent on the day of the exam can then be given the same test. You can arrange for them to do this before or after the regular school day or in the back of the classroom of a colleague. You may also arrange for them to take the test in the After-School Peer Tutoring Program.
- Prepare a shortened, alternative version of the test, requiring short essays. Over time, many teachers develop files of tests with such alternatives so that this becomes relatively easy.
- Use an all-essay makeup examination.
- Give an oral examination.
- Carefully examine the student’s notebook to determine that all notes are there and count this as a test grade.

- Give an alternate project or assignment with an inflexible due date.
- Departments could create a library of examinations for each unit or topic, making it easier for teachers to find alternate questions or tests. Departments could develop uniform unit tests with A and B versions.
- Each department has access to computerized test programs whereby a teacher could create an alternate exam with relative ease.

### 2.3.4. Makeups for Homework Assignments

Different departments place different weight on the completion and submission of homework assignments. In mathematics, for example, homework is a minor component of the grade (if students don't do it, they rarely pass the tests which are very important). In English, on the other hand, homework is far more important because it often includes Regents preparation essay work. The greater the importance of homework assignments, the more a teacher is obligated to establish makeup procedures and make students aware of them.

The following is a list of suggested procedures. Which combination a teacher selects depends on the class and type of assignment. As with major reports and projects, however, it is important that students know the makeup procedures *in advance*.

- Any missed assignments may be made up and submitted within x number of days. A student may borrow a classmate's homework log to find out the assignments missed.
- Assign a project related to class work acceptable for an agreed upon number of delinquent assignments. This could take the form of an oral report, which would benefit the entire class.
- Assign problems or questions from the textbook.
- Require the student to attend one tutorial session before or after school for each assignment missed.
- Require participation in an after-school activity.
- Devise a pre-existing list of assignments from which students may select makeups. This could require students to report on subject-related television programs, movies or periodical articles.
- If students are required to keep open-ended journals, extra journal work could be required.

- Have a policy whereby a student may miss one homework per marking period without penalty. A variation would be one out of every eleven assignments without penalty.

### **2.3.5. Makeup Cutoff Date**

So that teachers will have time to fairly grade makeup work, a cutoff date for makeup work will be established each semester, about five days prior to the due date for final grades.

## **2.4. ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF ASSESSMENT**

All of the procedures and ideas suggested so far in this chapter fall under the category of “Traditional.” Today, however, educational researchers are looking at alternative or authentic methods of assessment which take into consideration the individual learning style of each student and often try to relate evaluation to the real-life tasks students will face in the future. Just about every educational journal in any subject field will have an article on this type of assessment.

Of course, in an academic-vocational school, authentic assessment is nothing new. In the occupational classes, students are usually judged on the designs and patterns they create; the draping of garments; the actual construction of garments; the advertisements and illustrations they draw and paint; their creation of simulated business plans and PowerPoint presentations; their proficiency in handling real-life jobs in the Boutique. The whole concept of occupational education is to prepare students for the real world of work so assessment tends to be very “authentic.”

The purpose of this section is *not* to deal comprehensively with this topic, but to make you aware of some of the alternatives being written about and actually used in schools around this nation. You may want to research further information yourself or experiment with some of these ideas in your classroom.

### **2.4.1. Authentic/Alternative Assessment: A Potpourri of Ideas**

- Portfolio Assessment: This is the most commonly used method mentioned in the literature and it takes many forms. The bottom line is that

students keep a folder of all their work for the semester. Periodically, it is evaluated as a whole, with the teacher looking for improvement over the course of time. In some cases, students select a pre-determined number of exemplary pieces from the portfolio to be evaluated. This evaluation could form the basis for the entire grade for the semester or a significant part of it.

- **Oral Assessment:** This can take many forms, as students individually or in groups defending an idea or position; debates; presentations; etc.
- **Performance Assessment:** A student or group of students may put on a performance, create a DVD or PowerPoint presentation, etc., related to instruction which demonstrates mastery of skills and course content.
- **Job Related Assessment:** A teacher may determine that a student's experience in an after-school job is course-related and grant the student credit for keeping a log, reporting on experiences, getting a job evaluation from an employer, etc.
- **Community Service Assessment:** A teacher may determine that a student's experience giving community service in the school or neighborhood is course-related and grant the student credit for keeping a log, reporting on experiences, getting a statement of service from the head of the agency, etc.
- **Life Experience Assessment:** Some of our students are self-supporting; some are responsible for the household in which they live. A teacher may determine that a student's life experience is course-related and grant the student credit for keeping a log and/or reporting on these experiences.
- **Special Participation Assessment:** Some of our students are faithful participants in after school activities or out of school programs (Saturday art workshops, SAT preparation courses, etc.). A teacher may determine that this participation is course-related and grant the student credit for verifying and/or reporting on participation.

#### **2.4.2. Alternative Assessment and Multiple Intelligences**

Multiple Intelligence (M.I.) Theory tells us that different individuals learn in different ways. The more intelligences we address in our instruction, the greater the learning, on an exponential basis, will take place. As more connections are made between the different learning areas of the brain, the

greater the understanding and the higher the retention rate. Most educational psychologists agree that there are eight types of intelligences. Here is a summary of them with some descriptors:

*[Short descriptions of linguistic/verbal, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, musical/rhythmic, bodily/kinesthetic, naturalist, interpersonal, and intrapersonal were provided.]*

Of course, there are overlapping intelligences and all people possess all intelligences in some degree. M.I. Theory says that teachers can help their students develop all their intelligences by incorporating methods suitable for each into their instruction. And, by doing so, they will reach more of their students by addressing the dominant learning styles of each.

In general, instruction in English, mathematics, science, social studies and foreign language tends to be solely Verbal and Mathematical. It is important for the teachers of these subjects to remember that they are teachers—success stories—because they learned using these intelligences. However, these may not be the learning styles of the majority of people. In this school especially, we know that many of our students learn best through the Visual and Bodily modes.

If we accept M.I. Theory, we would feel that students may demonstrate mastery of course objectives in different ways. Traditional grading methods, like those previously described, do not always allow for this. In the traditional mode, we are saying that the student's grade is the average of all the forms of evaluation we use (most of which are either Verbal or Mathematical). In the alternative or authentic mode, we would say that the students should be evaluated on the basis of the method that best suits his or her learning style. In both modes, the student must demonstrate mastery of course objectives and content; however, the alternative mode is far more varied and individualized.

### **2.4.3. The Case of Traditional Assessment**

The discussions of alternative assessment and M.I. Theory are not without controversy. The traditionalists often respond:

- Students cannot know and often cannot determine their future careers. Current studies show that students may change careers up to five times over the course of their lives. Therefore, a student needs to demonstrate

mastery in a variety of modes, not just the one that fits his or her unique learning style. Employers care little about learning styles: They want all workers to produce according to the guidelines of the company, not the styles of the employees.

- While life experiences, etc., do demonstrate that students are having success in areas they need, they do not really relate to the academic objectives of the City and State.
- Alternative Assessment is unfair to students who still have to face the traditional assessments of the Regents and SATs, where everything is Verbal and Mathematical. Only when these tests are altered to include alternative assessments and multiple intelligences, should the teacher do so in the classroom.

Perhaps the question we as professional educators must ask ourselves is: How can we evaluate student performance so that individual learning styles are respected while at the same time teaching mandated curriculum and preparing students for standardized examinations? There are no easy answers.

## **Appendix B: Sample Weekly Bulletin**

### **WEEKLY BULLETIN: WEEK BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 9, 2002**

#### **Monday, September 9: Mass Drop**

All programs not distributed will be “mass dropped.” If you know a reason why any student did not pick up a program, please see Ms. Arnold.

#### **Tuesday, September 10: Regular Bell Schedule**

Program changes for all “0” freshmen OP classes ONLY beginning period 1 in the auditorium.

#### **Wednesday, September 11: Regular Bell Schedule**

Program changes for all “9” sophomore OP classes ONLY beginning period 1 in the auditorium.

#### **Thursday, September 12: Regular Bell Schedule**

Program changes for all “7 and 8” junior and senior OP classes ONLY, beginning period 1 in the auditorium.

#### **Friday, September 13: Regular Bell Schedule**

Program change makeup date, beginning period 1 in the auditorium.



## WEEKLY BULLETIN NOTES

### **1. Please Announce to All Students: No Loitering Outside of the School!**

Students who arrive to school early should enter the school building. The cafeteria is open. The library is open on most mornings. Students should NOT sit on our neighbor's property. Several buildings across from and adjacent to the school have gates in front of their entry steps. I have been informed by the 10th Precinct that non-residents going inside these gates are criminally trespassing and are subject to arrest.

### **2. Student Solicitation for Charitable Organizations**

Every year, several students want to engage in solicitations or fund-raisers for a variety of charitable organizations. While these students are to be commended for their commitment to community service, *they are NOT allowed to engage in such activities on school property*. Any students engaged in such activity must be reported to the deans immediately. The only fund-raisers permitted on school property are those officially sponsored by the Student Organization (COSA) or the Parents' Association and approved by the principal.

### **3. Lockers**

Students should use the same lockers they were issued last year. Students new to the school should listen to the announcements to hear information about purchasing locks and obtaining their locker assignments.

### **4. Faculty and Department Conferences**

All faculty and department conferences are held on Mondays. The tentative dates are indicated on the semester calendar distributed at the Opening Day Conference. They are also listed in the Calendar Notes that appear at the end of each Weekly Bulletin. *Please do not make any appointments on Mondays during the school year. This way you will ensure you will be free for these contractually required meetings.* Most of the faculty conferences

for the school year will permit teachers to work in self-determined Faculty Project Groups, as described at the September Conference.

### **5. Per Session for 2002–2003**

Per Session Activities are posted in 201. A list of the anticipated activities was distributed at the Opening Day Conference. Tuesday, September 10th, is the closing day for applications. If not all positions are filled, applications will continue to be accepted for specific activities, with priority going to the earliest applications. Reminder: Even teachers with retention rights in a particular position must apply. Because of budget cuts, many activities have been eliminated or had the hours reduced. Please apply for these positions as usual so that if extra funds become available and the activity is restored, your application will be on file.

### **6. Committee Volunteers**

Last week's Opening Day folder included forms whereby you could volunteer to serve on established school committees. If you are interested, please complete and return the form to Ms. D—— in 819 by the end of the day on Friday, September 13th.

### **7. Opening Day Folders**

If you did not pick up your Opening Day folder last week, please see Ms. D—— in 819 for your folder.

### **8. Program Changes**

Students in need of program changes will be able to obtain them by meeting with their counselors and school programmers in the auditorium this week. The schedule appears in the day-by-day schedule at the beginning of this bulletin.

### **9. Fire Drill Notes**

We must have several fire drills this semester. We will try to complete these while the weather is still agreeable. Please review Section 10, pages

74 to 80 of your *Teacher Handbook*. Page 74 gives a succinct summary of procedures. *Please Note: During the ringing of the fire bells, the class lines up at the door inside the classroom. The class does not leave until you hear the CONFIRMING GONG.*

It is easy to be complacent about fire drills when we rarely have problems with fires. However, this school is a 10 story building and, in the event of a real fire, a quick evacuation is essential. Please impart to students the importance of following the procedures summarized on page 74 of your *Handbook*. In some schools, it is common practice for teachers to carry their Delaney Books with them during a fire drill. Rationale: In the event of a real fire, the firefighters will ask if all the students in the school are out of the building. Each teacher will be asked to “count heads” using their attendance records for the day to know who was present. This is a good practice for all of us to follow.

## **10. Keep Our School Clean**

We can all help to keep our school clean. Encourage students to use the trash cans in the classroom and in the hallways. When appropriate, discuss keeping the school clean with students and have them encourage their classmates to use the trash receptacles.

## **11. Classroom Intercom Phones**

The phones in each room are intended for emergency use only. Emergency numbers have been pasted inside the boxes. If the phone in your room does not work or there are no numbers posted, please inform Mr. S—— in 201 immediately.

## **12. Evening School Registration**

Please inform all students that Evening School registration is continuing in their guidance counselor’s office.

## **13. Highlights of the School Year**

As good things happen, please send the principal a note. Describe the “happening” and give the correctly spelled names of the students in-

volved. As you know, these events are published in a *Highlights of the School Year* brochure and used for positive PR with visitors to the school, members of the apparel industry, and the media.

#### **14. Legal Reminders**

- Chancellor's Regulation A-105: If any Board of Education employee is arrested for any reason, this arrest must be reported immediately to the Office of Personnel Investigations, XXX-XXX-XXXX, and immediately and in writing to the principal. This reminder falls under the provision of Protect Yourself! Even if the arrest is eventually dropped, not reporting it as required by the regulation can have serious consequences.
- It is inappropriate for employees of the Board of Education to conduct "personal business" in a school or Board of Education office when assigned to perform their regular duties. To engage in such activity constitutes "misconduct." It is the principal's responsibility to make the staff aware of this.
- Conflicts of Interest: The Board of Education regulation governing Conflicts of Interest is fully described on page 72 of the *Teacher Handbook* and basically prohibits any Board of Education employee from having an interest in, or being an employee of any firm that has business dealings with the City of New York. Keep in mind that almost every business in the city does business with the City in some way or other! If you have any doubts in this matter, contact the NYC Conflict of Interest Board, 2 Lafayette Street, Suite 1010, New York, NY 10007. Waivers may be applied for in appropriate situations.
- Carefully read ALL of Section 9 (pages 69–73) of your *Teacher Handbook* (Legal Matters).

#### **15. Student Monitors**

Many students "do service" in different offices and for different staff members, usually during their lunch periods or the rare open period in their schedules. When you have a student monitor, you are officially supervising this student and you should maintain a written record of his/her attendance. In the principal's office, students must sign an attendance form each day. All staff should adopt a similar procedure.

**CALENDAR NOTES, FALL 2002**

Monday, September 16: No School—Yom Kippur  
Thursday, September 19: Parent Assoc. Meeting, 6:00–7:30, Room 821  
Monday, October 7: Faculty Conference (Project Groups Meet)  
Friday, October 11: First Marking Period Ends  
Saturday, October 12: Open House; PA Meeting  
Monday, October 14: No School—Columbus Day  
Saturday, October 19: PSAT Testing  
Monday, October 21: Department Conferences  
Thursday, October 24: Parent-Teacher Even Confer, 5:30–8:00  
Friday, October 25: Parent-Teacher Afternoon Confer, 1–3  
Monday, November 4: Faculty Conference (Project Group Meet)  
Tuesday, November 5: Staff Development Day  
Monday, November 11: No School—Veteran’s Day  
Thursday, November 15: Multicultural Extravaganza Assembly PA Evening Program—Auditorium  
Monday, November 18: Department Conferences  
Tuesday, November 26: Midterm Examinations  
Wednesday, November 27: Midterm Examinations; 2nd M.P. Ends  
Thursday, November 28: No School—Thanksgiving  
Friday, November 29: No School—Thanksgiving  
Monday, December 3: Faculty Conference (Project Groups Meet)  
Friday, December 6: JHS Counselors’ Open House  
Monday, December 9: Department Conferences  
Wednesday, December 18: Uniform Examinations in All Subjects  
Thursday, December 19: Uniform Examinations in All Subjects  
Friday, December 20: Uniform Examinations in All Subjects  
Monday, December 23: No School—Winter Recess Begins. No School until Tuesday, January 2  
Thursday, January 2: School Re-opens  
Monday, January 6: Faculty Conference (Project Groups Meet)  
Thursday, January 9: Parent Assoc Meeting, 6:00–7:30, Room 821  
Monday, January 20: No School—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day  
Tuesday, January 21: Last Day Makeup Work Will Be Accepted  
Monday, January 27: Regents Begin

# **Appendix C:**

## **Sample Parent Newsletter Article**

### **SCHOOL POLICIES REGARDING HEALTH, SAFETY, AND MEDICATIONS**

We take the health and safety of our students very seriously. This article is intended to make you aware of our most important policies regarding the health and safety of your child.

#### **Medications**

We know that many students take prescription medications. Students are encouraged to take these medicines as prescribed while they are in school. If a child is self-conscious about doing so, he or she is welcome to go to the Health Clinic, Room 343, to take his or her medication there.

The school itself cannot give any medicine to any child, not even an aspirin. Students should not share their own medications with other students; to do so is potentially dangerous, for what works for one student could be harmful to another.

Students who take prescribed medication for chronic conditions, such as asthma, are advised to register with Ms. Flower in Room 343. If possible, they should bring in an extra prescription of their medicine. Ms. Flower will keep this medicine in a secure place so that the student can ask for it if he or she leaves prescribed medicine at home. (Since this is a doctor's prescription, it would be the doctor, not the school, dispensing the medicine.)

## **School Clinic**

Room 343 is a Health Clinic. Students who feel ill or have a minor accident can go to the Clinic for help. Ms. Flower coordinates the Clinic with the help of a Health Aide. Even though the school may not dispense any medication, clinic personnel may dispense band-aids and bandages, call for emergency medical treatment, inform parents, and provide students with health information. Clinic personnel have a fine relationship with Emergency Medical Services and the emergency room at Manhattan Hospital, located a few blocks from the school.

## **Immunization**

The Clinic also handles immunization records. New York State Health Department regulations require that all student entering high school show proof of the following immunizations: 3 polio, 3 DPT, measles, mumps, and rubella. Ms. Flower will speak to students with incomplete records and send a letter home. Once a letter is sent home, the student has two weeks to comply with the regulations or be excluded from school.

## **Medical Emergencies**

There are about 1,800 teenagers on register at this school. Many come to us with medical problems ranging from the simple to the serious. In addition, as in any organization with 1,800 adolescents, accidents happen. By law, the school oversees the health and safety of your children while they are in our care. This is a responsibility we take very seriously. We have a Health Clinic where students can receive first aid and where parents can be called in cases of emergency.

We do not take chances with the health of the children in our school. If a child is having difficulty breathing or demonstrates any other potentially serious problem, we call 911 and have EMS come to the school. Often, the child is taken to a local hospital, usually the Manhattan Hospital's emergency room. We do not send children to the hospital alone—a school aide accompanies the child and stays with him or her in the hospital.

At the same time, we contact the parent or guardian to inform him and/or her of the emergency. It is then the responsibility of the parent or

guardian to go to the hospital. I am sorry to report that this is sometimes a problem, that parents informed of an emergency do not go to the hospital to care for their own children. School personnel can only remain at the hospital for a reasonable amount of time—reasonable meaning the time it should take a parent to get to the hospital. After this time, the matter is turned over to social services.

We at the school ask your help. We will try to provide your child with a safe and secure environment, but medical problems or accidents are part of life. In case of illness or injury, we will take no chances and will call EMS. We will have someone accompany your child to the hospital and stay with him or her for a reasonable time. However, it is your responsibility as a parent to arrive within an hour or two after you are notified. Thank you for your help and understanding in this matter.

School personnel are acting in your place when they feel EMS is needed. The cost of ambulance and emergency room services is the responsibility of the parent or guardian; past experience tells us that almost all health insurance plans or programs are accepted.





## Appendix D:

# Highlights of the 2001–2002 School Year

This school year began with the tragedy of September 11th. Obviously, there can be no highlights that would in any way diminish this terrible event. Fortunately, none of our students lost parents or siblings in either the World Trade Center disaster or the crash of flight 587. As a result of the former, for most of the fall semester, our school became a “host” school for the staff and students of the H.S. of ——. Their school is two blocks from “ground zero” and needed to be refurbished before they could return. Our school received recognition for this help: a commendation from the Board of Education; a commendation from the United Federation of Teachers; a visit from former President Bill Clinton.

Mayor Giuliani advised all New Yorkers to get on with their lives and return to normalcy. At Fashion, we have tried to do this and it is appropriate that we continue to celebrate the achievements of our students and staff in our annual *Highlights* publication.

- Student Sang ——— won the annual Wasserstein Perrella Christmas Card Contest. The card became the holiday card for Wasserstein Perrella, mailed out to their international clients and contacts. Sang ——— received credit for her design and a savings bond.
- *The Mural Book* by Janet ——— (our own visiting artist) features two of the student murals that currently grace the walls of our student cafeteria. Students in past classes of Ms. ——— and Mr. ——— created these fine works of art.
- Through a special grant, students and staff of this school were selected to participate in a special project which will create a poster to

commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Young Audiences. Students in classes taught by Ms. — and Ms. — are working with Young Audiences and visiting artists on this project.

- Teacher Tina — and Assistant Principal Madi — were selected to conduct a special workshop at the borough-wide *Creative Connections: Arts and the ELA Standards* Program on Staff Development Day. Their workshop, *Literature Quilts*, featured student made quilts that depicted events from the novels the students were reading.
- Our own Ms. — had an exhibition of her paintings at the Adler Gallery in Chelsea, November 30 through December 16.
- The futuristic designs of nine fashion art students were selected to appear in the December issue of *BFIA* (Body Fashion/Intimate Apparel) magazine. All are students in Ms. —'s class: Aurea —, Mayelin —, Yahaira —, Jonathan —, Enjorli —, Yolaine —, Priscilla —, Melanie —, Michelle —.
- Our school had two winners in the District's Holiday Card contest. Jessica — created the winning artwork for the Arts Education holiday card; Jessie — created the winning artwork for the Career and Technical Education holiday card. Both students are in Ms. —'s class. Their cards were professionally printed and mailed by these offices.
- Five students were interviewed by Teen Talk Productions on Fashion Trends. Their interview was aired on 91.5 FM and 90.3 FM. Terese —, Nadia —, Diana —, Marque —, and Aurea — took part.
- Artworks by our own teachers: Ms. —, Ms. —, and Ms. —, were featured in the Gallery at 66th Exhibition, *After School*, 12/5/01 to 1/30/02. The Gallery is part of the District Office.
- Seven students were selected by the Center for Arts Education to be part of an internship program. Barbara — and Piscilla — will intern with Kenneth Cole. Seon —, Vonetta —, Merly —, Julie —, and Dareyna — will intern at F.I.T.
- Sophomore Marissa — is a member of the newly formed Student Advisor Council to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. She was one of seven of our students who attended a CFE workshop at Teachers' College in December.
- In February, 19 seniors and juniors served as assistants for fashion designer Alvin Valley's first fashion show, held at Chelsea Market. To prepare them for this experience, they visited Mr. Valley's fashion

house and met with designers, stylists, and other staff. They were able to see how fittings were done and how workspace was utilized. Our school was given special credit in the press kit for the show. Ms. — made the arrangements and accompanied the students.

- Esther —, poet, writer, teacher at Marymount and CCNY, conducted poetry workshops for ninth grade English honors classes. The students wrote ballads, odes, and poems of direct address. Their work was submitted to the City College Poetry Festival and our school's own literary magazine. Ms. — coordinated this program.
- Our students' work was represented in a special exhibition, *NYC Kids Respond to a World in Crises*. Their work was on exhibition at the Diane von Furstenberg Studio Gallery from April 16th through April 26th. Ms. — coordinated our school's submissions to the Alliance for Young Writers and Artists (Scholastic Art and Writing Awards). Their artwork and poetry was published by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers, Inc. in *Artifacts: Kids Respond to a World in Crisis*. This included artwork by Jessica —, Michael —, Joshua —, and Angela — and poems by Joshua — and Guillermina —.
- John —, the *New York Times*, has expanded his mentoring role with our students. In addition to advising our school publications staff, he has helped several seniors with their college and scholarship applications. This spring, he is planning a field trip for our newspaper and literary magazine staff. This is Mr. —'s tenth year helping our students.
- The art works of Sharlene —, Ebony —, and Eliza — were selected for the PriceWaterhouseCoppers exhibition. The students and their teacher, Ms. —, were invited to a special opening reception on March 26th.
- Sasha — is a winner of the New York 1/Citibank Scholar/Athlete Scholarship. On March 15, she was interviewed on the *NY1/TV Sports Show*.
- Student Terese — received a Certificate of Merit for her entry in the 2002 Barnard College/CBS Essay Contest. She was honored at a ceremony on April 9th. Terese is a student in Mr. —'s class.
- Student Elizabeth — was one of only five New York City high school students selected to participate in the *Students Inside Albany Conference* from April 14 to 17. Elizabeth was selected on the basis of her essay "What Three Steps Would You Propose to Increase Citizen

Participation in Government.” The program is sponsored by the League of Women Voters and the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Dr. ——— served as our liaison for this contest.

- Sophomore Wendy ——— was accepted to the summer dance program, *Young Dance Makers Company*, which will host many events this summer and perform at the Jacobs Pillow dance camp. Wendy is a member of Ms. ———’s dance class.
- Christine ——— won second place in Action Skills at the statewide VICA competition in Syracuse. Ms. ——— is VICA Advisor.
- Poems written by Judy ——— and Mayelin ——— made the finals in the New York City High School Poetry Contest. Both their poems will be published in *Poetry in Performance* 30.
- Twelve students were finalists in the Japan Society History Day Competition 2002: *Bring Medieval Japan to Life with Art*. Their projects were exhibited at the Japan Society: Judy ———, Isabella ———, Crystal ———, Tiffany ———, Nastassia ———, Elsy ———, Jennifer ———, Dilenia ———, Emelis ———, Rebecca ———, Meraris ———. Their teacher is Mr. ———.
- The artwork of seven students: Tabatha ———, Beatriz ———, Yoleidi ———, Elizabeth ———, Karen ———, Becky ———, and Shanta ———, was selected for a spring exhibition at the Gallery at 66th, *Reflections of Ourselves and Our Cities*. Ms. ——— is the teacher of the students.
- LaShauna ——— won the bronze medal for Drawing in the New York City ACT-SO (Afro-American Cultural and Technology Scientific Olympics) Competition.
- The annual spring fashion show, *Stars and Stripes Forever—The Debutante Ball*, was much more than a fashion show. This was the response of our school to the tragedy of September 11th, dedicated to the heroes of that day. Stunning garments were elegantly modeled as related dance numbers introduced the various segments. The show was directed by Ms. ——— and choreographed by Ms. ———. The garments were designed and constructed under the direction of the senior fashion design teachers.
- Hua ——— won first place in the ESL Original Work category at the Bilingual Oratory Olympics on May 10th. Kaza ——— placed third in the Bangla Other Writer’s Work category.
- Senior Angela ——— won FIRST PRIZE in the New York City Playwriting Contest. She is a student in Ms. ———’s Drama class.

- Students in Ms. ———'s after school VATEA costume design class displayed their stunning garments at the Snug Harbor Harmony Street Fair on June 9th.
- Sophomore Neshia ——— led our PSAL's Girls' Softball Division in Earned Run Average (#1 in New York City), Strike Outs, and Wins. The team had a great season under the direction of its coach, Ms. ———.
- Fiordaliza ———, Valedictorian, Class of '9x, has been awarded the UFT David Wittes Master's Scholarship so she can continue her studies. Fiordaliza graduated from Syracuse this May as a Dean's and McNair Scholar. She will be attending Columbia University in the fall to study for a Masters in Bilingual Education.

#### Preliminary Report on the Graduating Class of 2002

- 269 graduates, with 205 planning to continue their education.
- 51 graduates were offered \$1,318,000 in scholarship and financial aid awards; 47 students accepted \$1,081,000 of these awards.
- Because of budgetary issues, the CUNY NYC Council Scholarships are delayed. Fifty-nine students are awaiting confirmation of \$1,202,000 in awards.

And finally . . .

To ensure continuity of vision and instruction, the Superintendent has designated Interim Acting supervisors for September 2002 to replace those who are retiring. Ms. Hilda ——— will be I.A. Principal; Mr. Daryl ———, I.A. Asst. Principal of Social Studies; Ms. Nina ———, I.A. Asst. Principal of Fashion Design and Fashion Art; Ms. Nancy ———, I.A. Asst. Principal of English and Language Arts. All have been at this school and been a part of a supervisory training program. The traditions of our school will flourish under their leadership.



# Acknowledgments

There is never anything new under the education sun. There is nothing new in this book. Everything in it has been passed down from past generations of teachers and school leaders. It is totally derivative. I can only hope that I have used this collective wisdom in ways informative, enlightening, and sometimes amusing to you, the reader.

Many people and institutions passed down this lore to me over the span of my career. I could never acknowledge all of them, but there are several to whom I must give credit.

First, a thank-you to the principals from whom I learned my trade: Murray Cohn at Louis D. Brandeis High School and Saul Baily at the High School of Fashion Industries. From them, I learned valuable lessons about retaining one's humanity amid the sometimes Kafkaesque world of school and district bureaucracies. I also learned from my many colleagues and fellow principals in the Manhattan High School superintendency. The principalship is a lonely position, and one can only really share its burdens with other principals.

Second, thank you to the staffs and students of Brandeis High School (1970–1980) and Fashion High (1980–2002). So many there helped me become a good teacher and later a school leader. Special thanks to my talented, dedicated, and supportive team of assistants at Fashion High: Madi, Marcia, Peter, Bill, Nina, Mike, Lorraine, Efraim, Hilda, and Howard.

Third, thank you to the Manhattan High School superintendents I worked under, whose advice and understanding belied the bureaucracy they worked for: Louise, Pat, Steve, Granger, and Tony. Likewise, thanks to the dedicated professionals at the then Board of Education—among



them, Larry, John, and Carmen—who taught me many of the technical and personal skills needed to lead today’s school.

Fourth, a profound thank-you to Bruce S. Cooper, whose encouragement and advice on the world of publishing helped bring this book into existence. And, a thank-you to Tom Koerner, Lindsey Schauer, and Janice Braunstein at Rowman & Littlefield for their patient nurturing of this new author.

Finally, many who helped me along the way are no longer with us. We honor generals and authors and scientists, but rarely do we give honor to educators who have devoted their lives to children. So, thank you to Murray Cohn, Hannah Lewis, Ann Kenny, Jason Fansler, and Howard Schlesinger.