

Case Study #1

ISLLC Standard #1: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Title: Improving Attitudes about the Success of Students with Disabilities

Key Questions:

- 1) What activities or actions demonstrate a school administrator's attitude and/or vision for student success?
- 2) What type of professional activities would facilitate a positive attitude toward student success among the administration of this school?
- 3) What would have been a more appropriate way to discuss the needs for improvement in the scores of students with disabilities?

Discussion:

At a large elementary school in the Clayton County Public School District, Badday Elementary, the "welcome back" faculty meeting began with the announcement that Badday was the only school in the district that didn't make AYP for the 2005-2006 school year. The school principal discussed with the school staff the breakdown of scores and pinpointed the grade levels and programs with the lowest scores. Before giving the teachers a break, the principal offered a few words she felt were encouraging and assured the general education staff that they were still truly a "school of excellence" but that the overwhelming number of special education students in the school put them at a testing disadvantage. Several general educators nodded their heads in agreement and seemed irritated at the notion that "their reputation" was damaged by students with problems that may or may not actually be living in the school's attendance area.

Several special educators were offended by the principal's comments and spent the break discussing how unappreciated they felt and how concerned they were that their administrator had such a negative attitude about their students. One teacher suggested they go together and speak to a district level administrator while another teacher felt they should just go as a group and speak with their principal about her comments and the negative attitude they felt she displayed in front of their colleagues. Ultimately the teachers decided to approach the administrator and express their feelings. The group offered to give a presentation at the next faculty meeting explaining the modifications and accommodations that could be useful in raising the test scores of students with disabilities within the school.

Answers:

- 1) A positive attitude is essential for an administrator who wished to convey a vision of learning that is supportive of all students. Supporting teachers of low achieving students is essential when demonstrating to your staff that you believe in the ability of all students, despite the challenges they face due to poverty, disability, or other extenuating circumstances.
- 2) It appears that the administration of this school needs to be encouraged to explore the needs of their students and the ways that their needs can be met despite the factors that are beyond the control of the school faculty. Professional development activities should be created that focus on effective strategies for improving test scores. A shared vision statement for this school should be developed and embraced. The school should use their vision to promote success and encourage positive attitudes amongst faculty for the sake of their student body.
- 3) I really feel this administrator handled this situation inappropriately and could have found a more positive way to pinpoint the need to focus on improving the test scores of the schools' students with special needs. This would have been a perfect opportunity for the principal to review the purpose of testing modifications and accommodations and discuss the appropriate way to implement them during times of instruction and testing. Focusing on the needs of these students instead of pinpointing their deficits would have indicated to the staff that the principal's intent was to improve the situation instead of insulting the special education teachers and placing blame on a particular portion of the population.

Case Study Evaluation: I would consider the administrator discussed in this case study to be at a developing level of proficiency with regards to educational leadership. This administrator passed judgment on a particular group of students and verbally accused a group of teachers in a large group setting. The communication skills demonstrated in this case study were sub-par with the quality of communication necessary to work as an effective administrator.