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**New York State Characteristic of Effective Leaders:**

**Leaders Communicate Clearly and Effectively**

Given the changing educational climate of today I feel clear and effective communication is a staple in all schools. Leaders must take in new information and then filter it properly to their staff so they can understand it. I feel fortunate to be part of a building and district in which clear and effective communication is seen on a daily basis.

One of my first undergraduate education professors told me the educational pendulum is always swinging and because of that not everyone in the profession is going to be pleased. Boy, do her words ring true now. New ideas and acronyms such as Common Core Standards and APPR are vastly changing the way educational leaders go about their daily business. Faculty can feel overwhelmed by all this new information. Now, more than ever, I believe leaders must be crystal clear in their directions, expectations, and goals. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2012) assert communication is “the lifeblood of every school organization” (p. 158). Without effective communication all faculty would be left in the dark and not know how to proceed.

I think our superintendent should be admired for the way he communicates with his staff. Even though he has the “most important” job he still avails himself and can be seen in classrooms. Specifically I recall one superintendent’s conference day last year when he explained the APPR, its ramifications, and how it will be implemented in our district step by step. I found this extremely helpful, and remember walking out of that meeting feeling better

about these new procedures. He assured his faculty that our district would be developing its own APPR form. One phrase he repeated constantly, and still does, is that Great Neck “isn’t buying into the idea that APPR will be used as a punishment.” He always has a way of making his staff feel more comfortable with any new procedure.

I feel that a school faculty should look at their administrators and leaders as role models. In the same vein that our students carefully watch teacher-to-teacher interactions, teachers do the same while watching administrators. It is vital that educational leaders communicate clearly and effectively to enhance the overall school climate. I was able to use this characteristic during my classroom observation and also included some of these ideas in my introductory speech.

### **Leaders Collaborate and Cooperate With Others**

During my internship I had the opportunity to work closely with my school building principal. Under her mentorship I learned first hand that in order to be successful you must work well with others. It is unacceptable for administrators to sit at their desks in solitude and expect their schools to prosper; instead, they must be active participants in the school’s daily life.

I saw every building administrator demonstrate this quality. Once a week all building administrators along with guidance counselors, school psychologists, social workers, nurses, deans, and the director of special education gather for a Pupil Personnel Team meeting. These meetings typically lasted about two periods in length. The director of guidance led the meetings and asked the team to identify students who are on their “radar”. Students can end up on the “radar” for many different reasons (e.g., cutting, family issues, failing grades, emotional health, etc.) I was fortunate enough to sit in on many of these meetings and watch the collaboration between all those members. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2012) assert that the “collaborative exchange within a school should cut across grades, departments, and programs to involve a

greater amount of communication and collegiality among staff members” (p. 403). This is just what these meetings did. They were extremely informative and allowed for all administrators to gain knowledge and insight into the student at the center of discussion. Due to these meetings, my building principal saw the need to bring in a medical professional to speak to the team about teen suicide. Prior to this topic being brought up a previous meeting, I was unaware that school district’s have outside psychiatrists and/or psychologists they can refer students and families to. I think this is a wonderful resource to utilize effectively.

### **Leaders Never Stop Learning and Honing Their Skills**

As technology becomes a major part of education today, teachers along with administrators must learn new skills in order to keep up in the twenty-first century. One of my building assistant principals recognized this, and sought out to help prepare educators ride this wave into the future.

This year students were finally granted access to personal school email accounts. These accounts allow teachers to communicate with students effectively and easily. Student government proposed this idea to administration and the board of education two years ago. I had the opportunity to sit in on student government meetings where representatives discussed the progress of this proposal. All students were extremely pleased that the superintendent and the board approved their proposal. During these meetings student government representatives modeled for the principal how their email accounts could be used in a variety of ways. It was interesting to see students teaching the principal. She welcomed their demonstration lessons very warmly, and was eager to learn.

Building administration found out this year that a one to one iPad initiative was beginning for all eighth grade students. This has a direct impact on the high school as next

year's incoming ninth graders will have a school-issued iPad. My building administration saw this as an opportunity for much needed professional development in this area. They established a technology committee to find out how the iPads were already being used in the middle school, and report back to the faculty. The committee meets once a month to discuss how to utilize iPads effectively in classrooms and has developed a master list of helpful apps to use. The technology committee has improved teachers' present skills and prepared them for additional responsibilities for the advancement of the school (Lunenburg & Ornstein, p. 448).

Administration also encouraged high school teachers to visit middle school classes to see teacher and students' use of the iPad. Earlier this year I attended the Florida Educational Technology Conference where I spent three days immersed in the world of educational technology. I was able to come back from that conference and provide helpful resources to faculty through a Building Curriculum Group meeting presentation. This information was then shared with the entire faculty.

### **Leaders Support, Develop, and Nurture Staff**

I remember that "new teacher" feeling and looking for support each and every step of the way. Untenured teachers are fortunate in my district as not only do they receive formal mentoring from a trained professional, but they also participate in monthly new teacher meetings, and have a teacher assistance committee to help guide them. When the building principal took office seven years ago, she saw the need for newer teachers to have more support and guidance. She established the monthly new teacher meetings where experienced teachers present information on a variety of topics (e.g., planning, methodologies, dealing with parents, etc.). I had the chance to present at one of these meetings, and shared some of my own "new teacher" experiences.

It's not only newer teachers who want to feel supported; all educators want to feel that throughout their career. According to Lunenburg and Ornstein (2012), "staff development in terms of continuous participation, feedback, and support of the staff is essential for school improvement" (p. 406). Building administration offers many in-service classes for faculty to take to brush up on skills and learn new topics.

I am grateful to have had such an eye opening administrative internship. These four leadership characteristics provided a guide of what to expect and what to look for during the internship. I feel fortunate to work in a district with such dynamic administrators as I do.

## Reference

Lunenburg, F.C. & Ornstein, A. (2012). *Educational administration: Concepts and practices*.

Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.