



Ontario Institute for Education Leadership L'Institut de leadership en éducation de l'Ontario

*Ontario Leaders Collaborating for Student Achievement, Equity and Well-being
La collaboration des leaders en Ontario assure la réussite, l'équité et le bien-être des élèves.*

Case Study 2: Leadership for School Improvement

Background

The Sigma Pi District School Board has an enrolment of 20,000 students in a diverse community including both rural and urban communities. The Senior Management team is made up of five Superintendents of Education each with their own portfolio and family of schools. The Director of Education is new to the community having being hired only a few months earlier.

Marcia, the Superintendent of Program presented the Board's EQAO results to the Board of Trustees at their September meeting. For the past several years, the Board has performed very well in EQAO compared to its statistical neighbours, except for flat results in the area of Mathematics. This year's results show continued improvements in Literacy but a dramatic drop in all levels of achievement in Mathematics and, for the first time, the board is well below the provincial average. The local paper published a full-page article outlining the board's dismal results and even provided opinions on how Math should be taught. The trustees are not happy.

The new Director believes in empowering his senior leaders, and wants Marcia to "fix" the Math problem. The day after the trustee meeting, he meets with her and makes it clear that the Math challenge is her responsibility and that she will be held accountable for future results.

Present situation

Marcia has strong problem-solving skills, and knowledge of effective school and classroom practices, but considers herself to have gaps in Mathematics instruction. She understands the need to move the system forward by improving student achievement and wished her colleagues shared her belief in the strength of working together. She recognizes the need for an intensive focus on professional development for all staff in Mathematics and, within her current budget, has struggled to find the funds to ensure teachers receive the training they require. To make matters worse, earlier that budget year, there was a reduction in the number of curriculum coordinators and consultants who provide instructional support to teachers.

Marcia is concerned about how principals will respond to potential challenges from parents, given the news articles. She has observed, in her school visits and in District Reviews, an inconsistency in teaching practices, low student engagement, and general apathy. She wonders if staff members lack the confidence to provide strong Mathematics instruction.

After reviewing the Board Improvement Plan, Marcia calls an emergency meeting of her consultants in order to develop a strategy to address professional development in the area of Mathematics instruction. She quickly realizes they do not share her sense of urgency.

At the next Senior Management meeting, Marcia requests support from her colleagues to reallocate funds from other budgets, as there are insufficient funds for system wide training at this point. Her colleagues remain silent. The superintendent with responsibility for IT suggests that she focuses on the enhanced computer resources that were recently placed in the schools as the solution. No other superintendents made suggestions or offers. Marcia feels isolated and is annoyed and disappointed that her colleagues do not recognize the EQAO Math issue and are not helping with her situation. She remains silent as the Director moves to the next item on the agenda dealing with parking space allocations.

Marcia is frustrated by the lack of support from her colleagues and director. She is at a loss personally and professionally as she is used to being able to find solutions more easily and collegially. She wonders how she will get through this and how she can create a sense of urgency around the EQAO Math problem.

Personal Leadership Resources (specific to the case study)

- Systems Thinking
 - engaging in futures thinking and consequences of action or inaction
 - able to understand the dense, complex and reciprocal connections among different elements of an organization
- Resiliency
 - being able to recover from or adjust to change
- Proactivity
 - being able to stimulate and effectively manage change on a large scale under complex circumstances
 - showing initiative and perseverance in bringing about meaningful change
- Problem-Solving Expertise

Leadership Practices at the System Level

- Spend sufficient time to ensure the mission, vision and goals of the system are widely known, understood and shared by all members of the organization.
- Insist on ambitious goals for teaching and learning.
- Encourage collaboration in the interpretive use of data.
- Set a manageable number of precise targets for district school improvement.
- Create structures and norms within the district to encourage regular, reciprocal and extended deliberations about improvement progress within and across schools, as well as across the system as a whole.
- Align the allocation of resources with district and school improvement goals.

- Create structures to facilitate reciprocal forms of communication. These structures and norms should result in deeply interconnected networks of school and system leaders working together on achieving systems directions.
- Knowledge of effective business practices that directly affect or improve our business practices

Reflective Questions

1. As Marcia, how would you engage your Senior Management colleagues to develop a system solution?

2. As team leader, how might she approach her program staff to engage them more fully in the solution ensuring accountability and collaboration?

3. Is Marcia fully accountable for the outcome? How should she engage her Director to promote collective responsibility and accountability?

4. As the new Director how might you nurture productive working relationships with staff and stakeholders?

5. What role does the Director have in collaborative implementation of the Board Improvement Plan?

6. As a member of the Senior Management team what is your role in addressing this issue and how would you support school principals?

7. Would your approach to this scenario be different if Marcia had applied for the Director's position and was not successful?

Personal Leadership Resource (PLR) questions

Cognitive

1. What cognitive resources has Marcia demonstrated?

2. What cognitive resources does Marcia need to work on?

Social & Psychological

3. What social and psychological resources will Marcia need to reflect upon to personally get through the situation?

Overall PLRs

4. In what areas does the Director need to focus for development of his personal leadership resources?

5. Reflecting on the Personal Leadership Resources (cognitive, social and psychological) what appear to be the needs of the senior team? As Director, what steps would you take to address these needs?

The Ontario Institute for Education Leadership welcomes questions and comments regarding the contents of this website and the work of the Institute. communication@education-leadership-ontario.ca. We invite you to take a few moments to complete the “**Satisfaction Survey**”.