



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 4: School Closure

Background

Joseph has been a superintendent for nearly seven years. He grew up in the community in which he works and he has been asked to participate in the process to review the potential closure of St-Exupérie Elementary School, the community school. He has been both a teacher and the principal at the school and he is now the school's superintendent. He is well known in the community as a hockey coach in the winter and a baseball coach in the summer.

Joseph knows the school board trustees very well. The local school trustee is a childhood friend.

Joseph strongly believes in transparent and consultative decision-making. He tries to reach consensus when making decisions. School principals thoroughly appreciate this approach. Joseph models shared leadership; he gives his principals quite a bit of autonomy, which can feel undermining to some senior management colleagues. He is sometimes perceived as making decision that are more in the interest of the community than the system.

Current situation

The local community has been impacted by the loss of the town's main employer which has caused many families to leave in order to find employment elsewhere. Since the appointment of the new Director of Education a year ago, Joseph has been concerned that the loss of the town's main employer has resulted in a decline in the school's enrolment and therefore, a decline in the available financial resources. The Director is required to implement a systemic plan to streamline board and school operations in light of this significant decrease in the budget.

For a year now, difficult discussions concerning potential school closures have been ongoing. Joseph is often left to defend the need for community schools with dwindling populations to the Board of Trustees.

He is very committed to St-Exupérie School, and knows it must close, even though he would rather it remain open, particularly since the school has excellent academic results and was awarded the EQAO Recognition Award last year. The nearest school is in the neighbouring community and there has been a sports rivalry between the two for a long time.

The school trustee has tried asking Joseph some questions about the fate of the school, but Joseph remains silent and strategic. During a senior management meeting, he learns that another school is even more at risk of losing students, but the director of education is still recommending the closure of St-Exupérie School because there is room for growth in the other neighbourhood, which is more strategically located near urban centres.

Joseph learns that he must be present during consultation meetings regarding the potential school closure, but that the Superintendent of Operations will lead the project. Following a board meeting, the director calls Joseph to her office where he shares his personal disagreement with the potential closure. Notwithstanding his personal belief, the director reminds him of his duty as a senior leader and insists that he support whatever the Board decides.

At the Board's subsequent Tuesday evening meeting, the Director announces the consultative process and the potential closure of St-Exupérie Elementary School. The school's trustee meets with Joseph following the meeting to find out whether he agrees with this recommendation and why he hadn't spoken to him about it previously.

Personal Leadership Resources (specific to the case study)

- Ability to perceive emotions
 - recognizing one's own emotional response
- Managing emotions
 - reflecting on our own emotional response and their potential consequences
- Act in emotionally appropriate ways
 - being able to control what emotions guide our actions
- 1. Systems thinking
- 2. Resiliency

Leadership Practices at the System Level

- Encourage trustees to focus on district policy and the achievement of the district's goals and priorities (policy governance model of trustee practice).
- Align organizational structures with the district's improvement goals.
- Encourage reciprocal forms of communication with and among schools.
- Demonstrate the importance the district attaches to its community connections.
- Develop communication systems and processes throughout the district to keep all members informed.

Reflective Questions

- 1. What is at stake in this situation?

- 2. Who should this information be shared with?

- 3. Why should it be shared and how should it be shared?

- 4. Should Joseph outwardly support the decision by being the lead instead of the operations superintendent? Why or why not?

- 5. In these circumstances, what should be included in the board communications plan?

- 6. What steps are required in order to ensure a smooth transition for students and staff?

Personal Leadership Resources (PLR) Questions

- 1. What personal leadership resources (cognitive, social, and psychological) does Joseph think he demonstrates strength in? Do you agree? Elaborate?

2. With reference to the PLRs, describe Joseph`s demonstrated cognitive abilities (problem solving, knowledge and system thinking)?

3. Using Joseph as an example, what dissonance can be created as a result of an imbalance between the cognitive, social and psychological personal leadership resources?

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**”.