



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 1: Educational Assistant in School

Background

Mark is in his first assignment as principal and has been in that role at Grove Elementary School for the past three years. He has a solid relationship with the parents and the community, and is always receptive to new ideas from parents. The school community has benefited from Mark's extensive background as an instructional leader in the Arts as well as his ability to find creative solutions. As a confident leader he is committed to his decisions and is action oriented.

The school is in a diverse community including a number of students with special needs. This September, the school was allocated eight Educational Assistants (EA's), which was a reduction from last year's allocation of ten. Mark has received numerous complaints from parents that student needs are not being met by the current number of staff. Although he brought the parents' concerns to his superintendent, no EA's have been added.

Present situation

Earlier this week, the mother of Alex, a child on the autism spectrum, came to see Mark. Alex was assigned a full time EA to support him in his regular Grade Three classroom. His mother shared that she had recently completed training in Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) and is excited about her new knowledge. She offered to volunteer full time to support Alex in the classroom and believes this would improve her relationship with her son as well as help him succeed.

Mark has strong empathy for families with children who have special needs and accepted her kind offer. He immediately started to think of where he could reassign the EA to help support other needs in the school. At the end of the day, he initiated a conversation with the EA currently assigned to Alex and told him he would be reassigned to another classroom to begin the next day.

The next morning, the Grade three teacher was surprised to find Alex's mother organizing Alex's work space in her classroom. His mother excitedly told the teacher that she would be working with her from now on, as Alex's EA. The teacher was speechless and stormed into the office to confront Mark.

The teacher demanded that Mark remove 'that parent' from her classroom. Mark was surprised as this teacher was usually very flexible and supportive of parental involvement. He listened attentively and redirected her back to the classroom promising

to monitor the situation for the next week. The teacher unhappily returned to her class but made a quick call on her cell phone on the way.

The day seemed to have gone smoothly until Mark listened to two messages on his voicemail at the end of the day. The first was from his superintendent: "I understand that a parent is acting as an EA in support of a child with special needs in one of your classrooms. Can you please you need to call me back as soon as possible?". The second message was from the local trustee, thanking him for proactively addressing both the student and parent needs. Mark is vindicated by the trustee's phone call and is wondering what the superintendent could be concerned with.

Personal Leadership Resources (specific to the case study)

- Problem-solving expertise
 - articulates principles and values and identifies constraint
- Knowledge about schools and classroom conditions with direct effect on student learning
 - organizational and family conditions
- Ability to perceive emotions
 - discerning emotional responses in others through verbal and non verbal cues
- Systems Thinking

Leadership Practices at the School Level

- Consider staff members' opinions when initiating actions that affect their work.
- Engage teachers in decisions that impact their instructional work.
- Demonstrate respect, care and personal regard for students, staff and parents.
- Involve staff in the design and implementation of important school decisions and policies.

Leadership Practices at the System Level

- Encourage staff to be innovative within the boundaries created by the district's instructional guidance system.
- Ground interactions with, and advice to, trustees in sound evidence.
- Expect and assist schools to allocate instructional resources equitably.
- Align personnel policies and procedures with district's improvement goals.
- Provide prospective and existing leaders with extended opportunities to further develop their leadership capacities.
- Develop open, accessible and collaborative relationships with principals.
- Expect schools to focus on needs of individual as well as groups of students.

Reflective Questions

1. Has Mark successfully found a viable solution to a problem in the school? Explain.

2. What other school management problems has Mark created as a result of the solution?

3. How can Mark rebuild trust with and between stakeholders?

4. As Mark`s superintendent, what are the issues that you face as a result of Mark`s decision to allow the parent to act as her child`s EA?

5. As the superintendent, how would you approach the trustee?... Mark?

6. How will Mark restore his relationship with Alex`s mother if he is required to withdraw her from the classroom?

Personal Leadership Resources (PLR) Questions

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

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

3. Using the principal 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**”.