
Prologue

It isn't your father's school anymore, to paraphrase a commercial.

If Principal R. Van Winkle had fallen asleep in 1950 and awakened in 2000, few physical changes in the school building itself would be apparent, other than whiteboards and computers. If, however, he were to step into the principal's office, he would find the role vastly changed.

First, the relationship of principal with faculty has been transformed. The autocratic or benevolent dictator role has become one of building vision and consensus, developing teacher leadership, and implementing and sustaining change. Principals model, not mandate, best instructional practices. Principals are responsible for orchestrating a community of learners in which all educators continually strengthen their performance for the benefit of student achievement.

Next, Van Winkle would face federal, state, and local politics to a degree never encountered before. *A Nation At Risk* (1983) initiated education reform as a highly visible political agenda. Since the 1989 Governors' Conference in Charlottesville, Virginia, and the adoption of Goals 2000, virtually every state has enacted education reform. Unfortunately, many media and political depictions misrepresent current education's effectiveness, as Gerald Bracey states. These distortions have undermined public confidence and good will in spite of the fact that public schools have never been more successful. Subsequently, this misleading portrayal has diminished teachers' and the education community's standing. Today, even local school boards' election and governance are politically driven.

In addition, Van Winkle would find a rather well-researched body of literature on best practices in teaching, learning, and leadership. Teaching would remain an "art" but increasingly would rely on the science of brain-based learning. He would find the issue of teacher quality paramount for his professional survival, and he would discover the critical role of principal leadership in raising student achievement. Van Winkle would find technology in the classroom has changed from chalk to computers. He would have to learn quickly how to use technology to enhance the school's learning culture.

viii Emerging Issues in School Leadership

Van Winkle would also take one look at the student body and find radical demographic shifts. He would hear many languages spoken as students passed in the hallways. He would see various ethnic cultures with significant changes from his day in attitude and dress. Since Van Winkle's long nap began, public schools are again the social and learning engine of our democratic society. As Bud Hodgkinson and Gene Carter write, our nation's diversity will only increase, and the role of public schools in building a common American culture while respecting individual and group diversity will continue.

Similarly, Van Winkle would find newly included groups of students in the school—those identified with special needs. New acrostics—IEP, LD, SED, IDEA, LEP—would confuse and perplex the newly awakened principal. Preparing these students for effectiveness in a complex world beyond the small and sheltered community Van Winkle knows brings another major challenge.

Moreover, Van Winkle would find a level of accountability that never existed before he fell asleep. He would discover that assessments of student progress had evolved into high-stakes testing for students, principals, and schools. He would find the new ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001, "No Child Left Behind")—schools not making "satisfactory progress" toward goals must allow students to attend other schools at the "failing" school's expense. Should this lack of progress continue, Van Winkle would find his school closed.

Likewise, virtually all case law and legislation that guide school operations' legalities have come into effect since 1950. *Brown, Tinker, Lemon*, the Civil Rights Act, and Public Law 94-142 have significantly impacted the practice of education. Van Winkle can no longer rely solely on his past experience or personal judgment when making decisions about his school, his staff, and his students.

In short, Van Winkle would be hopelessly lost in today's principalship with yesterday's knowledge and skills. If he is to survive in his new role, he must cope with the changes and become aware of the issues facing education today. If he is to be truly effective, he must take a proactive and perhaps even an activist role in influencing politics and legislation affecting education. This book will make students of educational leadership aware of these critical and emerging issues facing our profession.

AWARENESS OF CRITICAL AND EMERGING EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

Perhaps most importantly, school administrators need to be aware of media misrepresentation of school effectiveness. Bracey's book, *Setting The Record Straight* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 1997) identifies commonly held yet erroneous beliefs about our

profession. If administrators are to be effective, they must know the truth about these myths-stated-as-fact. By knowing the realities, principals can counter the myths with logical and factual arguments rather than with defensive apologies.

These misrepresented issues include declining test scores, poor international comparisons of student achievement, the high cost of education, dismal graduation rates, the differences in results between public and private schools, and the inability of American public school graduates to compete in the global marketplace. All these issues resulted in and fuel the modern standards movement.

Accountability for student achievement has never been higher. Forty-nine states have enacted or are in the process of enacting high-stakes, standards-based testing. Ronald Brandt and Linda Nathan address the issues of high-stakes testing for students and communities. Standards have undoubtedly increased student achievement. The issue for many states is whether the standards and their assessments are appropriate. The consequences for students and schools are only now becoming clear.

Teacher quality is another issue. Research now quantifies what we have known intuitively. Since Principal Van Winkle's initial practice, we know now, as Robert Marzano reports, that having an effective teacher accounts for at least 26 percentile points on academic achievement tests. Principals need to know how to enhance teacher and teaching quality so every student will benefit from having an excellent teacher. Teacher quality is the fundamental equity issue for all students.

A related topic is for principals to know and be able to use the growing body of scientific knowledge about how students learn and which teaching practices accelerate and support diverse students' achievement. Much of the synthesis on brain-based learning is reported by Robert Sylwester (see *A Celebration of Neurons: An Educator's Guide to the Human Brain*, 1995). Van Winkle saw instruction as content-driven teacher performance. Teachers disseminated knowledge; students received it. They may or may not have learned it. Today, when students have access to more information than teachers can ever "deliver," the teacher-student relationship changes, as does the students' involvement with the subject. Teachers must understand, for example, the relationship of stress and learning, and of practice and transfer, and they must provide differentiated instruction, have students establish sense and personal meaning, and foster a positive and supportive climate. Van Winkle initially saw students "parrot" information; today, he must see students apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what they learn. He saw students working independently; today, they must often work effectively in teams. Increasingly, as Alan November states, technology is a means to foster this heightened student involvement in learning.

We can apply these insights and strategies to assist those who learn differently. We now expect all students to learn to a common high

x Emerging Issues in School Leadership

standard, and frequently, in the same classrooms. Principals face many challenges enlarging their school communities to accept and support students who learn differently, as Phyllis Milne writes. These traditionally disenfranchised students now have knowledgeable parents and advocates who represent their interests. Kathy Mehfoud notes the safeguarded legal procedures that direct special education students' programs. Van Winkle, who never saw a special needs student in his school, would be overwhelmed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING PROACTIVE

Awareness of where the accountability movement is taking education is critical. High-stakes testing reveals what some consider to be weaknesses in the schooling process. In addition, in a time of critical teacher shortages, state lawmakers are enacting provisions to decrease teacher and principal licensure requirements. Raising standards for students while decreasing standards for teachers and school leaders makes no sense unless lawmakers want public schools to fail and open the door for privatization of education. As Linda Darling-Hammond and Gordon Cawelti point out, research clearly connects teacher quality and principal leadership with student achievement. Educators need to be proactive in demanding research-based licensure requirements that enhance educator quality for their students. Many "quick-fix" alternative licensure routes do not prepare individuals to be effective in the classroom or the main office.

Increasingly, it will become critical for all educators to take a proactive and sometimes activist stance for our profession. Principals must be able to articulate the issues that impact student learning and well-being within their own school community. Principals must press for issues related to teacher quality for the sake of student achievement. Likewise, educational leaders must communicate the "big picture" that education requires meeting desired and measured standards but goes far beyond test scores. Influence, therefore, begins at home but must extend to the state capitol where legislation that impacts local practice begins.

Professional organizations have the ability to influence state and federal legislation through their member representatives. Members within the organization are also citizen voters who share a responsibility in shaping society. Influence involves developing position statements on important topics and educating legislators about various issues. In addition, collaborating with related educational organizations compounds their effectiveness as they work together toward common goals.

Principals practice in a crisis-filled environment. As Paul Houston illustrates, the Chinese symbol for crisis is made up of two sub-symbols: danger and opportunity. If we do not become proactive, our profession

faces grave danger. When we actively influence policy at the political level, we can see great opportunity for enhancing public education. We must work in the political arena to benefit all our students. The choice to influence is ours.

—William A. Owings
—Leslie S. Kaplan

REFERENCE

Sylwester, R. (1995). *A celebration of neurons: An educator's guide to the human brain*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.