Standard 5: Integrity, Fairness & Ethical Practice

Standard-Aligned Experiences

Potter Stewart, the United States Supreme Court Justice who was succeeded by Sandra Day O'Conner, was often quoted as having said, "Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do." (Coffey, 2013). Acknowledging that there exists a tension between these two conditions as a district leader, what you have a right to do and what is right to do, is a critical first step toward success. Although in a truly adaptive school, the concepts of "chain-of-command" and "hierarchy" hold less weight and importance than they may once have, there is no escaping that the role of "superintendent" brings with it the greatest decision-making authorities, permissions, and autonomy. As such, the role also carries the greatest responsibility for using said authorities in ways that protect, grow, and serve children and families. This includes promoting social justice and preserving the values of democracy and equity. These moral obligations are the focus of standard five in the internship experience. Evidence of standard indicators are to include:

- presenting to district leadership on an aspect of the Michigan Professional Code of Ethics (5.1)

- constructing a review of district policies/practices related to sharing confidential information (5.3)

- interviewing mentors to identify and understand the nature of and common challenges to personal ethical beliefs (5.2)

- developing a personal administration platform that defines our own personal values, beliefs and priorities (5.4)

- reviewing a regional, state, or national organization's code of ethics and analyzing surfaced concerns (5.5)

Internship work around each of these indicators of standard five is described below, with reflections following.

The Michigan Professional Code of Ethics (MDE, 2019) serves as a tool for educators in describing the responsibilities educators hold to the profession, for professional competence, to students, to the school community, and for the responsible and ethical use of technology. Rollout of the MICIP process and platform requires that as part of the assess needs process, district leaders engage in data sharing, data analysis and dialogue, and data uploads to the MICIP platform. By design, they are doing this work collaboratively as a team of many stakeholders (parents, students, community partners, educators) and in doing so, it is critical that they possess a firm understanding of FERPA rights and responsibilities. The Michigan Professional Code of Ethics (MDE, 2019) in section 5C requires that educators uphold confidentiality by:

- Taking appropriate and reasonable measures to maintain confidentiality of student information and educational records stored or transmitted through the use of electronic or computer technology

- Understanding the intent of Federal Educational Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA) and how it applies to sharing electronic student records; and

- Ensuring that the rights of third parties, including the right of privacy, are not violated via the use of technologies.

In light of this and as part of the internship experience, I developed a training around FERPA guidelines to ensure that district and building administrators understood their obligations before they began data sharing, review, and uploads as part of MICIP. Training materials included a slide deck, quiz, and quiz answer key, all adapted from the work of the MiSchoolData Train-the-Trainer Network, which I am a member of. Concurrent to the rollout of MICIP, mischooldata.org accounts are in the process of being merged with the MiLogin portal across the state. ISD's were given a lead role in helping leaders with active mischooldata.org accounts complete the

merger. While it's not our practice as an ISD to act as "gatekeepers" in our support of local districts, this unlikely chain of events created an opportunity to think about how we might sequence these three events (FERPA training, access to the MICIP platform, and access to mischooldata.org through the MiLogin portal) in a way that supports FERPA compliance. Ultimately, the process we developed begins with FERPA training, with access to both mischooldata.org in the new MiLogin system and the MICIP platform being granted *after* leaders have attended the training and successfully completed the FERPA training quiz. Not only does this process protect administrators from making critical mistakes with data confidentiality, but also provides the ISD an opportunity to model ethical use of data that administrators could take back to their own district for use in similar scenarios. Both the training materials (5.1) and review of process (5.3) can be found in the EDL 770 Google shared drive "MICIP Rollout Experiences" folder.

Indicator 5.2 asks that candidates interview their mentors to identify personal ethical beliefs they hold important to effective leadership and describe situations where those ethical beliefs may have been challenged. In my case, I felt the interviews were a great springboard for reflection prior to completing indicator 5.4, which requires development of a personal administrative platform, identifying the personal beliefs, values, and priorities that would guide my own leadership practices. The first interview was completed with Scott Koziol, internship mentor and Assistant Superintendent of Instruction at Char-Em ISD. Assistant Superintendent Koziol identified "loyalty, trust, and selflessness" as the values he tries to model on a daily basis in his leadership. He also spoke of loyalty being the value most challenged in various situations, especially in the case of moving from one organization to the next as he sought out new leadership opportunities. The second interview, completed with Ben Hicks, Char-Em's Director of Special Education, was through provoking as well. Ben's interview highlighted some very real challenges to the work of advancing the learning of students with a disability, most of them originating with adult mindset and misconceptions of what a "disability" means. As a leader, the

greatest challenge Ben has in the work is to mediate the thinking of adults that otherwise, leads to placing artificial ceilings on what students with special education services can achieve. This interview caused me to think about "mediating thinking" really being the primary role of an administrator/leader, with numerous audiences….students, parents, teachers, board members, community members, etc. It also made me wonder how well prepared administrators/leaders are for this role given how difficult it is to change long held perceptions that can be traced back to one's belief system, and even identity. I see this as an area of need in preparation programs...how does one mediate the thinking of others to create change? Fortunately, Ben has been deeply engaged in the work of The Thinking Collaborative, including Cognitive Coaching and Adaptive Schools training, yet my hunch is that these opportunities are not common across preparation programs and more commonly, as Ben experienced, acquired on the job through continuing education. Given the complexity of mediating thinking and its importance in the skill set of leaders, this might be something worthy of inclusion in forthcoming leader preparation programs. These two mentor interviews served as a helpful springboard for thought, along with work completed in EDL 740, for completion of the personal administrative platform which defines my own priorities for school district leadership and supports the vision I hold for schools: becoming gathering spaces where what we would want for own children, all children receive. Copies of the mentor interview and my personal administrative platform can be located in the "Additional Evidence" folder of the EDL 770 Google shared drive.

The final indicator of standard five, 5.5, required attendance at a regional, state, or national meeting of a professional organization and following, a review of the organization's code of ethics to identify any potential areas for concern. In my current role, I am a member of the Michigan Continuous Improvement Facilitators' Network (MCIFN) which meets quarterly to learn about, share resources related to, and align services with state standards as they pertain to continuous improvement. During this internship, I attended two of these meetings, one on January 19th and the other on March 16th, 2021. My review of the recently revised MCIFN

bylaws in search of their "Code of Ethics" resulted in the discovery that they did not exist. Finding none, the following recommendations were made for inclusion in the next bylaw revision:

1) MCIFN should broaden their current purpose statement to include supporting the principles of "whole-child" and "equity-focused" in state and district improvement efforts.

2) MCIFN should establish and incorporate a "code of ethics" into their organizational bylaws. The code of ethics should include current meeting "working agreements" as well as membership input around who we need to "be" in our ways of work to support the ideology of whole-child, equity focused education.

3) MCIFN should be intentional in developing meeting agendas and protocols for member engagement that support and deepen members' understanding and ability to model "whole child" and "equity" in their work with districts.

A more comprehensive analysis of the bylaws and recommendations for code of ethics inclusion can be found in the "Ethical Beliefs & Values" folder, housed within the "Additional Evidence" folder of the EDL 770 Google shared drive.

Personal Learning Reflection

In adolescence, my parents frequently reminded me that 'if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything". Those words are still perched like a bird on my shoulder when faced with difficult decisions, especially those that challenge or call into question whether I will uphold as a leader the morals, ethics and values I hold dear or abandon them in favor of the easy road. Practicing mindfulness to gain clarity at times such tension emerges has helped me avoid making decisions that are not only wrong in their immediate context, but could also compromise my integrity moving forward.

However, one of the key aspects of this standard I've been reflecting on is the importance of not just having clarity around what those personal beliefs, values and priorities

are that comprise your vision for leadership, but being able to communicate and share them in ways that you start to see them reflected in the daily actions and decisions of others. For example, it's not going to be enough that you hold and live these values if you have no influence on others around you to do the same. This kind of influence requires that leaders be able to translate their vision, values and beliefs into frames of reference familiar to stakeholders and in ways that cause them to cross-examine, and even purge their own ways of thinking in favor of the desired shared vision.

As part of the hiring process in Petoskey (I was a third year teacher at the time of my hiring), the final interview was with the superintendent, Dr. John Jeffrey. His reputation was well known in our geographic area for being incredibly caring, intentional in both word and action, and passionate about kids. He also had a reputation for putting candidates through the ringer during the final interview and it being not just a formality, but rather an opportunity to "prove" that you measured up to the same standards he held for himself. In fact, there existed an unwritten, yet well-known list of candidates who had made it to this point in the candidate selection process only to be told at its conclusion that they were likely an exceptional teacher, but not the right fit for the district, and encouraged to pursue options at districts that might hold values more closely aligned with their own. You would think that the ripple effect of this would be that his principals, who had recommended final candidates based on their own confidence of "fit", would feel undermined in their decision-making and that fewer candidates would be encouraged to apply in the district. However, quite the opposite was the case. The man was revered. His principals, of which I later became, hung onto his every word like bees on pollen and it was customary to have hundreds of applications come in for a single teaching position.

Unfortunately, Dr. Jeffrey passed away in 2017, a death grieved by so many and extended far beyond his hometown. Although it's important that each leader strive to become the best version of himself/herself, and be authentic to the strengths he/she possesses, it's hard not to reflect on and try to emulate the things Dr. Jeffrey did to create an environment where his vision

became that of those around him. Although I will not do justice to what they were, here are a few that stuck with me:

- He was visible in the lives of those around him, far beyond just being physically visible in buildings. He knew the names of your spouse and children, what you had told him about your goals as an educator the day he first interviewed you, and made a point of personally connecting with you to remind you of the value you held in the organization because of those things. He also was very visible in the building, walking the halls every morning to greet staff and students, showing up during lunch hours to eat cafeteria food and chat with students, and working the fence crowd at home athletic contests to hear their ideas and concerns.

- He clearly articulated the goals he had for the district in concise fashion and expected you to be able to do the same. It was common for him to end a conversation asking you to recite the three goals of the district, which were consistent over his tenure and I can still recite today. They were also clearly posted in every classroom, hallway and gathering space throughout the district's four elementary, middle and high schools. If he noticed one not in place, he'd ask if you needed another and it would be in your mailbox within days. He started every back to school year speech with a review of the progress we had made toward these goals as a team, awarding specific people he felt had made significant efforts to reach them a "Silver Dollar Award" and ask them to stand in front of the auditorium while he gushed about how hard they had worked to live the goals we shared in common.

- He also invited people in...into his office, into his own life, and into the district. He was not stuffy or pretentious, although if you read his resume he had a right to be. He made himself vulnerable in front of others, even sharing publicly during meetings with the Board of Education mistakes he had made before they even knew he had made them, modeling taking responsibility for shortcomings. He also said "yes" almost all the time to

ideas that stakeholders generated to do something great for kids....and then he would help them figure out how to make their efforts successful, as opposed to saying "no" because parts of the plan still needed work. These demonstrations of inclusion benefitted the district as there was little separation between the schools and the community during the tenure of his leadership, thus when he asked for their support on a millage or proposal, stakeholders readily gave their support.

While I could continue with many more attributes that demonstrated the values Dr. Jeffrey held that created a culture representative of his own values and beliefs as a leader, these three (being visible in the lives of others, clear articulation and widespread communication of goals, and inviting others in) are the three that most influence my own leadership platform. While I do not seek to become the leader Dr. Jeffrey was, as that would not even be possible, his leadership did provide a model for high standards of ethical practice that will serve as a compass in my own career.

References

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