The difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary is that little “extra.”

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Thanks for Your Participation

The Ohio University Leadership Project staff would like to thank each of you for your participation in our Professional Development Programs during the 2000-2001 school year. Your commitment and involvement are what make the programs of the Leadership Project successful. We are in the planning stages of programs for the summer and the next school year - your input and suggestions are welcomed. Thanks again for your participation with the Leadership Project!

Bill, Robin, and Ann
The participants, in the elementary principals’ professional development program, engaged in professional growth on February 15th and on April 5th. Both sessions were conducted at facilities in Pike County. Elementary principals from Adams, Highland, Gallia, Jackson, Lawrence, Pickaway, Pike, Ross, and Scioto were in attendance.

The morning portion of the February session involved a presentation and discussion with Fred Fastenau of the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators. Instructional strategies, special education, statutes, regulations, and current legislation were addressed. The afternoon session involved a roundtable discussion of matters pertinent to the participants. They included off-grade testing, oppositional defiant disorder and the IEP, proficiency testing with a focus on the special education component, and restraining violent children and germane statutes.

The April session featured Cyndi Reighard from the Ohio Department of Education. Cyndi worked with the participants throughout the day regarding the new state standards pertaining to instruction and learning. The afternoon session also featured a panel discussion with principals who already had participated in a site evaluation by a team from the department of education.
March 14th and April 11th marked recent seminars for the secondary principals’ professional development program. The seminars were conducted at the Ohio University Chillicothe and Southern campuses, respectively. Principals from Fairfield, Jackson, Pickaway, Pike, Gallia, Lawrence, Ross, Scioto, and Vinton counties were in attendance.

Conflict management was the focus of the March seminar. Joe Griesheimer, a principal in the Chillicothe CSD and an instructor at the Ohio University Chillicothe campus, was the featured speaker. The seminar also involved small and large group work sessions. The principals grappled with and shared their responses to the challenging aspects of conflict management.

The April session was focused on a potpourri of issues. The approach primarily involved the participants engaging Steve Raines, Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Secondary Administrators, in a question and answer session. The discussion was timely and thought-provoking.
Local funding and tax increment financing and a roundtable discussion were the foci of the March 22nd seminar of treasurers’ professional development program. This seminar included a morning session with Ed Laramee, deputy auditor of the Fairfield County SD. He focused on local funding issues. Later in the morning, the focus switched to tax increment financing. The discussion was led by Jeff Teeters of Teeters Consulting and Research. After lunch, the Fairfield County treasurers led a roundtable discussion.

The May session is scheduled for the computer lab at the Ohio University Chillicothe campus. The focus of the session will be functional approaches to the development of appropriation documents. The session will be led by Ernie Strawser, treasurer of the Jackson CSD.
SUPERINTENDENTS

Professional development approaches and challenging current school district issues were the substance of the March 27th and April 24th seminars. The seminars were both conducted at the Ohio University Chillicothe Campus. Superintendents from Gallia, Jackson, Meigs, Pickaway, Pike, Ross, Scioto, and Vinton counties were in attendance.

Paul Pendleton, Executive Director of the Mohican Institute, led the March session. Its primary mission is the professional development of superintendents which was the focus of this seminar. Other topics were addressed in a roundtable discussion led by the Pickaway County Superintendents.

The April session focused on current and challenging issues facing school districts and their superintendents. Staff evaluation was given particular attention. Jerry Klenke, the deputy director of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators, led the discussion. Small group work sessions coupled with a large group discussion of questions regarding issues currently being addressed by superintendents concluded the session.
If you were to start over as a superintendent in another district, what would you do differently?

I would continue to meet as many people as possible and take part in the social service and business aspects of the community. I would listen even more intently. I would praise my staff more. I already say thank you and write thank you notes, but I would publicly praise the staff from the very beginning.

I would establish a Community Relations Committee and a Superintendent’s Cabinet if these did not already exist in my new district. These committees have been valuable as a method of distributing and receiving information.

Are there things you would not do again if starting over?

It is sad to say, but I would be a little less trusting. I would ask for agreements in writing and would not be as free with my personal time. There has to be a balance; I’m still searching for that balance. I would not be as impatient with people when they do not embrace change. I read books, attend seminars, and listen to audiotapes in an effort to develop my leadership abilities and to understand those with whom I find it difficult to relate.

What has been your happiest moment as the superintendent at Oak Hill?

Without a doubt, it was when our district’s Bond Issue passed. This was the first Bond Issue to pass in almost fifty years. The passage of the Bond Issue means modern schools for all of the children in my district. I think I was happy not only for what this meant to our children, but because it rewarded the efforts of a community that joined together to make it happen.

What is the best piece of advice you have received as a superintendent?

“Base your decision on what is best for kids.” This sounds so simple, yet sometimes is very hard to do. I attempt to follow this piece of advice. The second phrase that comes to mind is “You do not have to know all of the answers.” I have learned to gather as much information as time will permit before making decisions. I network when stumped and have a good attorney who specializes in education and returns phone calls.

If given the opportunity to start over, would you be a superintendent?

Absolutely, the positives far outweigh the negatives. The chance to make a difference is why I chose education as a career. As a teacher, it was to make a difference in the lives of children. As a principal, I supported teachers in their efforts to make that difference. Now, I support the principals so they can support teachers in making a difference in the lives of children.

What advice would you give to a beginning superintendent?

Give particular attention to: your own care; organizing your administrative team; all forms of communication; relationships and evaluations. Do not beat yourself up. Consider your mistakes as opportunities to learn. Ask yourself “What did you learn?” and “What would you do differently if faced with the same or similar challenge again?”

Organize your administrative team. Choose your own team if possible and trust them. I have realigned my administrative team. I attempt to place individuals in positions where I believe they will best serve the district’s needs. Once given their position, I step back and trust that they are responsible and capable of doing the job.

All forms of communication require attention. Relationships with staff, board members, and community are vitally important. Staff evaluations provide help to those who need it. They offer needed documentation in situations when non-renewal is warranted. Evaluations offer praise to an employee when he/she is doing a good job.

Read books on just about anything related to leadership. I usually have one professional book, one self-help book, and one just for fun book that I read before I go to sleep.
THE SUPERINTENDENCY:
An Interview with Jerry Blankenship - Part Two

This article is a continuation of the interview with Jerry Blankenship, Superintendent, Scioto Valley Local School District.

If you were to start over as a superintendent in another district, what would you do differently?
I would choose a school system similar to the one I am working in. I work in a small rural district where most everyone knows everyone else. I like that. We have children here who generally know how to say please and thank you. They have been taught that and are from good families with strong traditions. I would also allow myself the luxury of choosing my own administrative team.

Since taking the job August 1st, we have hired a new elementary and a new high school principal. We have also added a part-time curriculum director. We have been able to learn and grow together to form our own team’s personality. What we have lost in valuable experience, we have gained in forming administrative goals that are similar throughout the district.

Are there things you would not do again if starting over?
I was chosen for this job in May; however, I did not officially come on board until August 1st. During this period I was the high school principal. The past summer was especially difficult, as we not only employed the principals but also fourteen additional staff positions. Finding good people, in my opinion, is the most important job that I have.

During this time, I was also chosen to serve on the negotiating team. It led to a hectic summer before I ever took over. I would not overload myself to the point that I felt ineffective. I would prioritize my time better.

What has been your happiest moment as the superintendent?
On October 19th, we had an in-service that was planned by staff members. At that meeting, time was set aside to allow any staff member to present another with a flower and thank them for their efforts. It was very rewarding to be part of something where we took time to acknowledge each other. Educators know that we have a special job that can provide stress, which can take its toll on you. It was very gratifying to see the staff come together at that moment. Hopefully, it was the first of many times for that to happen.

What is the best piece of advice you have received as a superintendent?
When working in the Paint Valley system as a teacher, my principal, Don Anderson, was a very dear friend of mine. Don, known as Jigger to all, told me when I was leaving the classroom to go into administration not to develop amnesia. He said never forget what it feels like to walk in the shoes of teachers and other staff members and never forget what it feels like to be a student, a child if you will. That was the best advice and have used it often when weighing decisions.

If given the opportunity to start over, would you be a superintendent?
Yes! As stated earlier, the responsibilities of this position are enormous. I knew that coming in. The rewards of the position are even greater. To know that you have a chance to be a major part of something that can forever change the lives of children is, for an educator, the greatest reward of your professional life.

What advice would you give to a beginning superintendent?
The best advice I could give is to heed Jigger Anderson’s advice. Don’t forget what it is like to walk in their shoes (students, teachers, and parents). Mandates, proficiency, building projects, finances, etc. are all very important and should be given time. But the heart and soul of the profession goes back to treating people the way you would expect to be treated. That, along with having the conviction to create a vision and work diligently towards it - that’s the best advice I could give.

What one book should a beginning superintendent read?
The book that has caught my attention is Professional Learning Communities at Work by DuFour and Eaker. I attended a workshop hosted by Dr. Eaker last summer and saw in the workshop and book the school that I believe most teachers would want to teach at and most students would want to learn at. We are in the process of dissecting the book through department heads and are implementing its concepts.
Another school year is amazingly about to come to an end. Proms, graduations, and all the other end of the year activities that are typically enjoyed by the participants but give principals more gray hair are in full bloom just like many flowers. And of equal importance is the planning for the next school year that is being addressed by school leaders.

Some members of the public think of the summer as a time in which little occurs in its schools. Actually, many leaders work diligently throughout the summer making plans for the next school year. A sage school administrator once told me that those administrators who work the hardest and wisest throughout the summer usually enjoy the next school year and often enjoy it better than those administrators who do not recognize the importance of planning.

Summers also are a time for professional development for teachers and administrators. Once local superintendent shared with me recently that an activity is planned, for her staff, for nearly every week of June, July, and August.

The leadership project staff will also be busy at work this summer. One of its activities will involve the development of plans for the 2001-02 school year. Your input and suggestions are always appreciated. Please contact me at larson@ohio.edu or at (740) 533-4580.

Until then,

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