

1 The Formal Job Description

At a recent conference for administrators at C. W. Post Campus, Long Island University, the 100 principals in attendance were asked to develop a job description for a school principal. Initially they enumerated a list of characteristics that would serve as a definition for the ideal human being. One-word attributes such as caring, humanistic, organized, collaborative, knowledgeable, sensitive, decisive, pleasant, and inspirational were enthusiastically offered. The task was expanded, and the principals were required to develop a summary of the essential functions required of a school administrator. These descriptors became quite realistic and helped them in their quest to develop a more comprehensive job description.

Box 1.1. Essential Functions of the School Principal

The principal

1. Is knowledgeable of the school district's and state's procedures, regulations, and curriculum requirements
2. Evaluates staff, offers constructive assistance, and recommends retention or dismissal of all personnel
3. Determines procedures, schedules, and methods to meet academic and disciplinary objectives
4. Advances the idea that the caring for students is the school's top priority

(Continued)

6 • Mastering the Balance of the Principalship

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5. Exercises leadership in making the school a productive environment in which to learn and work
6. Acts to create a school facility that is an attractive and pleasant place for students to learn and for faculty to work
7. Relates well to community members and describes the school's objectives to all the district's citizens
8. Values the participation of community members in school activities
9. Is prompt in responding to questions and issues that arise with students, staff, and community members
10. Expands the normal workday to include attendance at evening and weekend school and community functions
11. Is a calm problem solver in conflict situations and avoids the alienation of any segment of the student body, staff, or community
12. Brings pride to the school with his or her presentations, written material, and daily communications
13. Is timely in providing required reports, making teacher observations, and responding to parental requests and student concerns
14. Develops building procedures with staff that guarantee the safety of the children and all employees
15. Continues to update personal skills by reading journals, attending conferences, and taking in-service courses
16. Motivates staff to reach for a higher level of professional practice
17. Organizes each school activity in a manner that minimizes hindrance to the building's academic tone
18. Makes a conscientious effort to learn the names of students, understands their needs, and assists in the solution of their personal problems

19. Considers the special talents of each teacher when developing their assignments and student loads
20. Assumes civic obligations and responsibilities as well as leadership within the Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

SOURCE: Restructuring K–12 Education Institute, August 8–12, 2005, C. W. Post Campus, Long Island University, Brookville, New York.

After reviewing their collaborative effort, the group still had considerable doubt about the thoroughness of the list. It was decided to have all principals submit their own school districts' job descriptions, and the group would cull from them the meaningful items they wished to add in developing the model. The differences from district to district were enormous and often stressed each school system's unique major concerns and academic priorities. It was obvious there was a need to explore a common language for terms such as "position" and "job description" in order to zero in on the task.

After a group analysis and the use of a host of reference material, the term "position" was defined as follows: "A position is a collection of duties that include the total work assignment of a single employee." The job description thus describes a position's purpose and scope, major responsibilities and functions, authority, terms of employment, and relationship to other positions in an organization. An addendum to a job description should include the license requirements of the position and applicable state education department regulations; the whole should be legally consistent with the district's policy manual.

Box 1.2. Model Job Description

Job Title: School Principal

Job Goal: To supervise and administer all personnel and activities within the school. In line with the No Child Left Behind legislation, to fully develop the skills of all pupils in order for them to live productive lives in our democratic society.

Reports to: The superintendent of schools.

(Continued)

8 • Mastering the Balance of the Principalship

(Continued)

Supervises: All professional and nonprofessional staff assigned to the school.

Job Responsibilities:

1. Supervise the school's instructional program.
2. Improve the academic program through in-service courses, the evaluation process, and the encouragement of staff study groups.
3. Develop and monitor a wholesome, comprehensive extracurricular program.
4. Provide an orientation program for all new staff members.
5. Develop an effective master schedule in order to maximize use of the skills of every faculty member.
6. Collaboratively plan faculty meetings to provide in-service training, encourage staff cohesiveness, and enhance the school's educational tone.
7. Observe and evaluate all personnel to optimize performance of both professional and certified staff members.
8. Assist in the interview process of all personnel and make appropriate recommendations to the central office administrator.
9. Establish a businesslike academic tone for the school.
10. Improve safety measures as ongoing priority. Ensure that all state and local laws are followed and drills are held on a timely basis.
11. Meet with appropriate staff members to systemize procedures for guaranteeing the health and welfare of students and building personnel.
12. Ensure that the facility is physically attractive and that every effort is made to make parents and other visitors feel welcomed.
13. Work cooperatively with transportation officials to ensure that bus runs are timely and that students behave properly on buses.

14. Meet regularly with the head custodian to inspect the school, remove hazards, plan work schedules, and monitor the cleanliness of such areas as the halls, student cafeteria, classrooms, and bathrooms.
15. Monitor the building's budget to make certain that supplies are delivered in a timely fashion and that there are appropriate cash flow balances.
16. Oversee the availability of supplies, equipment, and educational materials.
17. Prepare all required reports in a timely manner.
18. Develop a positive working relationship with parents, the PTA, student clubs, and community organizations.
19. Interpret school policies and describe school programs to the community, and encourage community participation in the building's daily activities.
20. Implement board policies and make recommendations to the superintendent concerning school personnel, the budget, and curriculum changes.

SOURCE: Restructuring K-12 Education Institute, August 8-12, 2005, C. W. Post Campus, Long Island University, Brookville, New York.

Even among accomplished practitioners, efforts to develop a comprehensive job description often fall short of expectations. This group's reexamination of the many different job descriptions from almost 100 school districts and 18 states only served to cloud the issue. They were stymied when they realized that they could not effectively utilize this valuable and available academic resource. Eyes rolled when one of the participants said, "Why don't we each pursue an independent research study of the topic?" The group acknowledged that they were approaching the topic in an unprofessional manner. Although the participants were talking from experience, all members staunchly defended their own perceptions and neglected to examine the broader ramifications of their descriptors.

A comprehensive research of educational literature and academic Web sites produced the only job description that was thorough and inclusive of all tasks, and it served as the model for what they were attempting to develop. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)

10 • Mastering the Balance of the Principalship

has developed a set of leadership standards for school principals that are presently viewed by professional educators as the most inclusive model to be used throughout the United States (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). These standards have been used by several states to license school principals. More important is the fact that the descriptors have been the basis for restructuring principal preparation programs in many universities. Additionally, the standards have served as the model used by numerous states and educational consultants to redesign professional in-service programs for incumbent principals. As noted in Figure 1.1, each of the six standards contains the phrase, "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by. . . ." The standards leave no doubt about the fact that the principal's first priority is the education, health, and safety of children. Each of the six standards is divided into three sections that are titled, respectively, "Knowledge," "Dispositions," and "Performances."

The six major headings for each ISLLC standard are listed in Figure 1.1, along with the essence of their extremely comprehensive recommendations. The complete itemized characteristics have been included in Resource A at the end of this book, and they will serve as a ready reference for educators, researchers, and educational theorists. The summary shown in Figure 1.1 was necessitated by the fact that there are 180 actual standards, as may be reviewed in Resource A. It was evident that many categories have descriptors that overlap; they did not need to be repeated in the present chapter.

In summarizing the findings, it was necessary to explore some understated skills and several critical omissions from the ISLLC standards. It seemed obvious that the standards were written with an overemphasis on the humanistic qualities that an administrator should possess. Admittedly, there is not a single characteristic that researchers would recommend to omit. However, the feeling remained that there are times when an administrator must take unilateral action, and this behavioral strength is minimized in these standards. Some actions taken by children and staff should not be tolerated. There are also incidents when the administrator's decision is nonnegotiable. This reality gave birth to the writing of this book. Evidently, there is a need to balance a leader's compassion with the frequent situations when decisive action is necessary.

Something else is absent from the ISLLC standards and needs to be augmented and professionally explored. How does an administrator implement these job descriptors? How does the principal make students, teachers, and parents into believers? In other words, by what techniques does a principal project a compassionate, caring, and collaborative demeanor? Chapter 2 will fully explore the techniques by which a principal can implement several of these worthwhile standards. The following chapters will

Figure 1.1 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC):
Standards for School Leaders

Standard 1

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

This standard addresses the need for the principal to be

- Knowledgeable about current educational trends
- A consensus builder with negotiation skills
- A believer in education for all
- A leader supporting high standards and continuous school improvement
- A visionary leader whose mission is communicated to students, staff, parents, and community members
- Able to develop core beliefs that guide continuous school improvement

Standard 2

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

These characteristics of a principal include

- The ability to know and apply learning theories
- A knowledge of effective instruction and how to assess staff performance
- A comfort with technology and its use in teaching and learning
- An understanding of the goals of lifelong learning
- A passion for motivating students and staff to meet high expectations
- The sensitivity to value diversity and individual contributions
- The expertise to create a safe learning environment
- A belief in professional development to promote student learning

Standard 3

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

A summary of this standard requires a principal to

- Work effectively with the community to enhance student learning
- Involve the children's families as stakeholders in the school
- Make certain the community is informed about the school's mission and accomplishments
- Know and utilize emerging educational trends
- Manage time to maximize attainment of the school's goals
- Share responsibility to maximize ownership and accountability

(Continued)

12 • Mastering the Balance of the Principalship

(Continued)

- Resolve problems in a timely fashion
- Be sure the school plant, equipment, and support systems operate safely

Standard 4

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Under this heading, the principal's numerous responsibilities include

- A need to be aware of community resources, dynamics, and trends that impact the school
- A belief in collaboration and communication with families
- Comfort with the involvement of families and other stakeholders in the school decision-making process
- Encouraging diversity and the participation of families in the education of their children
- A passion to develop a comprehensive community-relations program
- A desire to reach out to different business, religious, political, and service organizations

Standard 5

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

This set of standards is rarely stressed in school job descriptions. They remind educational leaders that they must

- Adhere to the professional code of ethics
- Be aware of the role of education in the history of our society
- Profess the ideal of the common good
- Be an advocate for the right of every child to a free, high-quality education
- Accept the consequences for upholding their principles and actions
- Be guided by the Bill of Rights in dealing with children and staff
- Demonstrate a personal and professional code of ethics
- Accept responsibility for all school operations
- Protect the rights and confidentiality of students and staff
- Fulfill legal and contractual obligations
- Open the school to public scrutiny

Standard 6

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

These descriptors are under the heading of educational leadership within the entire community. They are expanded to include the principal's role in reaching out to all constituencies. In this context, the principal must be able to

The Formal Job Description • 13

- Understand and communicate the role of public education in a democratic society
- Be knowledgeable about educational and constitutional law
- Understand the political, social, cultural, and economic systems that affect schools
- Utilize current models of change and conflict resolution
- Be aware of local and global issues affecting teaching and learning
- Maintain a constant dialogue with representatives of diverse community groups
- Recognize the variety of ideas, values, and cultures within the school community
- Believe that education is the key to opportunity and cultural mobility

SOURCE: Council of Chief State School Officers. (1996). *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC): Standards for School Leaders*. Retrieved April 1, 2006, from <http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/isllcstd.pdf>.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and member states. Copies may be downloaded from the Council's Website at www.ccsso.org.

specifically enumerate issues that must be handled promptly, definitively, and unilaterally. The ISLLC standards suggest handling these situations with kid gloves; this author, by contrast, suggests utilizing a much-needed firm hand instead.