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ABSTRACT

Included in this annotated bibliography of 11 publications are reports asserting that ethical values are an integral part of school leadership and must not be neglected in the pursuit of academic excellence. Subsequent reports suggest that adequate moral socialization should be demonstrated by school administrators, focus on the ethical principles that must guide administrators when divulging information, and outline whether teachers should assume the responsibility of developing and enforcing ethical standards in the school. The remaining documents reviewed suggest that routine decisions sometimes involve ethical values and can be perceived as a pattern of wrongdoing; that administrators must become aware of how values and ethics affect the way that their school is run; and that objective ethical reasoning is possible, important, and aids in the understanding of methods of ethical reflection. (KM)

Number 100, December 1989

*The Best of ERIC* presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management

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# Ethics and the School Administrator

1 **Calabrese, Raymond L.** "Ethical Leadership: A Prerequisite for Effective Schools." *NASSP Bulletin* 72, 512 (December 1988): 1-4. EJ 381 947.

Ethical leadership, writes Calabrese, is an integral part of effective schools. Such leadership should be informed by a democratic society's traditions and values. Hence school administrators must respect all members of the school community, treat them equally, appreciate diverse opinions, and distribute school resources fairly between students and teachers.

Calabrese offers ten ethical guidelines to help administrators meet these goals. They should begin with a sound educational philosophy that informs their day-to-day actions. They must then apply that vision by creating a strong moral vision. They must refuse to tolerate discrimination or ineffective teaching.

Other guidelines address establishing a strong school community. Principals should visualize it "as a single unit where groups cooperate . . . a warm, inviting place" where people feel appreciated. The rights of majority groups should not overwhelm the rights of minority groups, and ethical decisions will not always please the majority

Principals must remember that "the organization exists to serve the needs of its members." Principals should be committed to service. Ethics also requires moral courage, the willingness to do what is right in the face of pressure or anger. But ethics is not just for crises. "An ethical environment," Calabrese asserts, "is achieved through thousands of decisions."

2 **Doggett, Maran.** "Ethical Excellence for School-Based Administrators." *NASSP Bulletin* 72,512 (December 1988): 6-8. EJ 381 948.

The push for academic excellence should not, Doggett believes, cause principals and assistant principals to neglect their jobs' ethical dimensions. He presents twelve ethical issues commonly faced by secondary school administrators.

Many of his examples concern relations with teachers. Teacher evaluations should be well researched and honest, not "flowery essays designed more to please than to commend." Nor should principals automatically side with teachers in their conflicts with students or parents. Teachers deserve to be criticized when they need it, and principals should be careful not to play favorites. This means basing classroom assignments strictly on merit and promptly recording illegal or immoral actions by staff members.

Neither should principals run roughshod over teachers. They should resist the urge to overturn faculty decisions if they have promised to abide by them. They should not let pressure groups dissuade them from supporting teachers, even if the angry parties threaten to complain to the school board.

Ethics also relates to how administrators relate to students and to the broader community. The varsity quarterback or student council president should not receive preferential treatment. Neither should principals attempt to hide their schools' flaws; they should be open and truthful about what transpires in their institutions.

3 **Greenfield, William D., Jr.** "The Moral Socialization of School Administrators: Informal Role Learning Outcomes." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 21,4 (Fall 1985): 99-119. EJ 329 616.

Greenfield presents a two-part thesis in this research-oriented article: moral socialization occurs in administrator-preparation programs, though seldom in a very conscious fashion, and administrators should have to demonstrate "adequate moral socialization to the values, attitudes, and beliefs central to members of the administrative group."

He looks at recent studies to support his thesis. Research shows that aspiring and new administrators are most heavily affected by their immediate supervisor and by their overall work environment. This pattern of work socialization encourages conformity and retards innovation. Socialization theory suggests that rectifying these drawbacks is difficult since those who defend the status quo (experienced administrators) also control access to the profession.

Yet, says Greenfield, the status quo is probably not in need of radical reform. School districts can influence how their administrators are morally socialized by articulating clearly what values they desire, encouraging prospective administrators to participate in leadership-development institutes where desirable values are taught, identifying and rewarding administrators who practice desired values, and providing retraining and support for administrators who are not sufficiently socialized to their jobs.

These steps would, for the most promising candidates, lead to an intense two-year graduate program. That program would explicitly treat the moral aspects of school administration.

4 **Harden, G. Daniel.** "The Principal's Ethical Responsibility and the Parent's Right to Know." *NASSP Bulletin* 72, 512 (December 1988): 12-14. EJ 381 950

Harden's topic focuses on a specific question. What ethical principles should guide school administrators as they decide how much information to divulge to parents?

He posits five ethical assumptions: families are people's most central social component; parents almost always have a sincere interest in their children's welfare; the school is also concerned with children's welfare; the state has an interest in education, and the nation's democratic ethos mandates equal opportunity and respect for human dignity.

These five assumptions should inform what parents should know about their children's experience in three particularly sensitive areas: discipline, special education, and counseling.

Parents need not be informed of every word of encouragement and chastisement their children receive in school. But they should certainly be apprised of formal acts of approval or disapproval. This sort of information is vital to the family's welfare.

School administrators have a legal obligation to be completely candid about special education cases. "The implication is clear and strong—school administrators must make all pertinent information available to parents" so parents can be fully involved in their child's remedial education.

Principals should also strive for close cooperation with parents whose children are receiving school counseling. That service, after all, is not independent of the school fabric; hence information learned in counseling sessions "must be at least passively available for parents." State authorities must of course be notified if counseling reveals that a student is being abused by a parent.

Much more commonly, however, school personnel should believe that parents wish the best for their children. As a rule, Harden asserts, "parents stand on ethically firm ground in exercising their right to know."

5 **Hostetler, Karl.** "Ethics and Power: Implications for the Principal's Leadership." *NASSP Bulletin* 70,488 (March 1986): 31-36. EJ 334 232.

Hostetler fears that the recent quest for excellence in education may lead principals to neglect the ethical aspects of leadership. They must balance the duty to achieve certain desired results with the need to maintain fundamental standards.

Hostetler cites Kant's emphasis on the importance of respecting people as an example of a fundamental standard. Respect for people entails respecting their self-determination and autonomy, realizing that they tend to behave according to certain rules or standards, and granting that they have intellectual integrity and should therefore not be deceived.

School administrators are often tempted to ignore these principles. A principal who expects some teachers to use the weekly faculty meeting to complain about the duty schedule may set the meeting's agenda so that a less explosive topic will crowd it out. This tactic, while understandable and even defensible, violates the teachers' integrity on several counts: it purposefully avoids a topic that is important to them, it offers no explanation for why the topic is being avoided, and it implies that the teachers are incapable of discussing the topic in a nondisruptive fashion.

Principals should respect and listen to others, not manipulate them with charisma or subdue them with power. Administrators too often confuse preserving power with effective leadership: "The preservation of the power structure is not an end in itself; it is only good so far as its aims and accomplishments are good." Power must be wielded, of course, but it should be wielded with a high regard for other people's beliefs and autonomy.

This consultative, nonauthoritarian style of leadership is effective as well as ethical. The author cites a study in which effective principals, with all their differences, share this in common: close, personal involvement with parents, students, and teachers.

6 **Lieberman, Myron.** "Professional Ethics in Public Education: An Autopsy." *Phi Delta Kappan* 70,2 (October 1988): 159-160. EJ 377 532.

7 **Hostetler, Karl.** "Who Says Professional Ethics Is Dead? A Response to Myron Lieberman." *Phi Delta Kappan* 70,9 (May 1989): 723-25. EJ number not yet assigned.

Lieberman and Hostetler disagree sharply over whether teachers should assume much responsibility for developing and enforcing ethical standards in schools.

Lieberman defines a profession as an occupation in which fee-taking experts formulate and apply a set of ethical practices to protect their clients. This is not practical for large groups of workers employed by one organization, particularly when that organization is public rather than private. Hence the fact that administrators rather than teachers must protect the public from poor teachers is, in the author's words, "neither deplorable nor avoidable."

Leaders of teacher unions cannot supplant administrators as ethical watchdogs. The former, asserts Lieberman, are accountable only to teachers while the latter represent the public. The union's role is to protect and advance its members' interests. It exists to defend teachers accused of wrongdoing, not to ensure that wrongdoing does not occur.

Hostetler argues that we should conceive of "conditions under which teachers can take active roles in maintaining ethical standards in their profession." Is it not possible, he asks, for teachers to both defend and prosecute their peers? "One can defend 'one's own' without closing one's eyes to the possibility that wrong has been done and should be addressed." Teacher organizations could both participate in determining sanctions for unethical acts and protect their members' rights.

He also questions Lieberman's contention that school administrators are accountable to the public. In practice, says Hostetler, "some administrators are rewarded for *not* being fair and impartial in their judgments about teachers. It is loyalty to superiors that counts."

A system of checks and balances in which teachers participate might work better than one dominated by solitary administrators. Groups, not just individuals, can be held accountable for decisions. When a union prosecutes one of its own members, that member could still turn to the school administration, community, and courts for protection, says Hostetler. Teachers do not necessarily demand that their unions never examine their actions

8 **McCormick, Kathleen.** "Malfeasance: How One Weak Moment Can Ruin Your Career." *The Executive Educator* 6,11 (November 1984): 17-21. EJ 306 726.

McCormick cautions that "the decisions you make every day—regardless of whether you view them as important ethical questions—could be the basis for what might be perceived as a pattern of wrongdoing." Such decisions may at first appear harmless enough.

Three administrators in Nebraska were caught using their status as purchasing agents to buy surplus items for personal use. They had reimbursed the school system for these purchases, and one of the parties had bought less than $100 of merchandise. The school board nonetheless spent $12,000 on the case and dismissed all three executives for knowingly committing immoral acts.

A Chicago high school principal spent many thousands of dollars furnishing her office and providing gifts for students and teachers. The principal asserted that these expenditures were appropriate because they provided a more positive environment for parents, students, and staff. Many school and legal officials disagree.

Administrators may suffer grave consequences for not following the letter and the spirit of the law. A federal grand jury in Texas indicted school personnel for concealing that they had used federal money earmarked for milk to instead buy cottage cheese and ice cream, dairy products that its students much preferred. A superintendent in Ohio faced criticism for spending nearly $3,000 of district money on personal telephone calls and travel expenses. He defended himself by claiming that he relied on his friends' free advice and hospitality and that $3,000 worth of telephone calls and gas was a small sum for the district to pay for his friends' services.

Such incidents are highly damaging even if they do not result in convictions or dismissals. Discriminating what is a crime from what is not, the author concludes, is "less critical than determining what diminishes integrity."

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## 9

Seldin, Clement A. "Ethics, Evaluation, and the Secondary Principal." *NASSP Bulletin* 72, 512 (December 1988): 9-11 EJ 381 949.

Seldin illustrates how ethics works by first describing a conversation over dinner between a high school principal and one of his school's untenured teachers. The teacher recounts her mother's illness and mentions that her husband might soon be laid off. The principal feels uneasy as he drives home. Was the teacher trying to influence his decision over whether she should receive tenure?

Five generalizations offer assistance to principals facing such questions. The first is that students' educational welfare is of primary importance. This commandment should inform every decision principals make. They must also "demonstrate in their words and actions a deep and genuine respect for the classroom teacher," particularly when deciding whether to promote them. Principals should not, unless student welfare is directly threatened, divulge confidential information about teachers.

Seldin's last two generalizations address principals' personal behavior. Providing teachers with positive, helpful criticism will set a positive tone for the entire school. Administrators must also eschew moral relativism; their daily ethical behavior must be consistent.

The author concludes by applying his five ethical commandments to the opening scenario and finds that the first three apply. The principal should honor his students' welfare by not letting the teacher's difficult personal life affect his evaluation of her competence. He should respect her dignity by assuming that her comments were not intended to influence his decision over whether to award her tenure, and he should honor her privacy by keeping her remarks to himself.

## 10

Stout, Robert. "Executive Action and Values." *Issues in Education* 4,3 (Winter 1986): 198-214. EJ 363 341.

"School administrators," Stout asserts, "have been trained in theories of organization which fail to account for the fact that the dominant purposes of schools are moral." Administrators must become aware of how values and ethics affect how their schools are run.

Two schools of thought on school organizations support this assertion. One group of scholars argues that school administration too often becomes an end in itself, that principals' love of order creates schools that are orderly but stultifying. They preserve the existing, unjust social order. Administrators should instead democratize schools and foster a critical spirit.

Another group of scholars stresses that rational models of school organization may seem sound in theory but that they rarely work. Actual organizations are ambiguous and complex because people are ambiguous and complex, and theories of school administration must take people's actual behavior and beliefs into account.

Stout advances several examples to argue that managers' values influence their organizations' policies. School board members and superintendents pursued desegregation because it seemed like the right thing to do, not because they were forced to. Morality, Stout concludes, is an essential aspect of education. Administrators have values, and those values influence how schools are run.

11 **Strike, Kenneth A.; Emil J. Haller; and Jonas F. Soltis.** *The Ethics of School Administration.* New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1988. 137 pages. ED 304 752.

This book has two central purposes: to persuade readers that objective ethical reasoning is possible and important and to help them understand how to do ethical reflection. The book's heart is its middle five chapters, which feature five thorny case studies in ethical decision-making and extended discussions of the issues the case studies raise.

Chapter 4, for example, describes the dilemma faced by a superintendent who must choose between a program for migrant Hispanics and one for the district's talented and gifted students backed by politically powerful constituents. The administrator could make a strong case for either program using the principle of maximum benefit. The program for Hispanics might save society money in the long run by helping them to escape poverty, but investing money in students who are talented and gifted might have tremendous economic and intellectual payoffs. Yet applying the precept of maximum benefit baldly could justify even slavery if slavery enhanced society's average welfare. Hence moral sensibilities play an important role in ethical decisions. In this instance, the superintendent could argue for the Hispanic-education program since it would almost certainly make a more profound difference in their lives than any program for talented and gifted students would make in the lives of children from wealthier families.

Another chapter, on educational evaluation, features an administrator who is convinced that one of the district's science teachers is dangerously incompetent. The catch, however, is that the evidence against the teacher is largely hearsay, and his supervisor has not given him honest evaluations. The authors again suggest that the principle of maximum benefit should be overridden, this time because the principle of equal respect has not been observed; the teacher has not been evaluated fairly and given a chance to reform.

In one other major case study, a principal is faced with a faculty that unanimously refuses to accept the school board's decision to end a controversial program on moral education. The teachers argue that they, not board members, are qualified to evaluate the curriculum's merits. This case introduces the concept of democracy and sovereignty. The authors suggest that while expert opinion such as teachers' beliefs should certainly be weighed heavily, the school board more accurately represents the entire community's opinion, including the students' parents.

The book features some two dozen shorter but similar scenarios. It uses concrete examples not to solve ethical dilemmas, but rather to suggest how ethical thinking can proceed and illuminate difficult decisions.

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