

Best Administrators Lead by Example

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Students who attend Whitfield County Schools are fortunate to have good schools and teachers, but that quality does not develop accidentally. Few would disagree that teachers are the backbone of the school. Leading every good school, however, are administrators who support those teachers and their students. It would be more difficult for educators to provide the wonderful teaching and learning that takes place in their classrooms without a strong school administrative team. Just as a good principal can set the positive direction of a school, putting the wrong person in the principal's seat can cause stress on teachers, parents, and students resulting in destruction of the overall climate of the school.

About this time each year, we have many teachers apply for available leadership positions. As superintendent, I have the responsibility of choosing and placing individuals in administrative positions. This is a difficult task that I do not take lightly. I carefully examine the educational experience and characteristics of each applicant. Prospective administrators must have worked as teachers and must have the leadership license required by the state. There are many characteristics that I feel an administrator must possess in order to be considered for a leadership position.

Promising applicants are scheduled for an interview. The first question I need applicants to answer is, "Why do you want to become an administrator?" School administration is not a good career choice for the faint of heart, and being a good teacher does not always mean the person is suited to be a good administrator. A teacher who wants to be an administrator just to get out of the classroom is not a good applicant. Good administrators miss working directly with the students and look for every opportunity to be in the classroom.

School administrators must possess a wide range of abilities whether they oversee an elementary, middle, or high school. They supervise not only the instructional curriculum, but also manage the staff, the school budget, and the facility. This requires good interpersonal skills and the ability to build relationships. An administrator needs self-confidence, good communication skills, and the respect of the community.

Decision-making and problem-solving skills are essential. Administrators must have the ability to see all sides of a situation and propose fair solutions. They must be able to make quick decisions while ensuring that all resolutions are made in consideration of what is best for the student.

Recent economic conditions have required that educational leaders be resourceful and creative in the way they spend their school funds. Budgets must be closely examined, ensuring that teachers have what they need to teach while operating the school within its allotted funds. An administrator must have a vision for school improvement and invest money in a manner that will support that vision.

The best administrators lead by example. They don't just write out rules; they model expectations. They realize the staff watches how they respond to difficult situations. An effective administrator's door must always be open. He must be willing to listen to others, recognize that other people have good ideas, and be comfortable giving others credit when their ideas work well.

The successful administrator will arrive early and stay late. She will fill whatever role is necessary in emergency situations. For example, if a teacher must leave early, the principal should be willing to supervise the class if needed. Effective administrators humbly admit when they make mistakes and, if possible, learn from their mistakes as they correct them. At the same time, administrators must hold others accountable for their actions and reprimand a staff member when needed.

What makes a school administrator an effective school leader? There is no single answer. Instead, it is a blend of an individual's qualities and characteristics. As school leaders, they are responsible for seeing that every child in their school receives the best possible education.