



A Look Back at My First Year as a School Administrator

By Educator Barnes – May 21, 2020

This school year, I transitioned into the role of a school administrator. Previously in my career, I have served as an English teacher, English as a New Language teacher, literacy coach, and

librarian. Although I took tools and knowledge from those roles into my current position, nothing could fully prepare me except experience.

For 11 out of the 14 years of my career in education, I have served in traditional public schools. For my first administrator role, I transitioned back to the public charter school setting. I am currently a middle school academic dean in a K-8 school. In the words of my father, "What exactly do you do?" This school year, I supervise a team of nine teachers which includes the English department, Social Studies department, and the Art Teacher. Next school year, I will supervise the English department, the Specials/Elective department, and the middle school building sub. My principal does not supervise any teachers. She supervises the second tier of administration which includes my role. In addition to evaluating my team, I also observe and coach them weekly. I attend their co-planning and data meetings, and I create and lead some professional development. Last, I serve as a member of the leadership team.

The hardest part of the administration is feeling like the middle man. I was just in the trenches with teachers, so I know how they feel. However, I also have to carry out the mission of the school and my principal's vision. School administration is a careful balance between the two. Some days, I got it right, and some days I got it wrong. Most of all my driving force was not to become like the administrators who did not do right by me. I did not want to do to someone else what had been done to me. I also wanted my teachers to know that I care about them and would take care of them so they can take care of our students both academically and socially.

I could tell you how I did, or I could show you. Each semester, my school issues direct supervisor feedback surveys. I completed one for my principal, and my teachers completed one for me. After leaders receive the feedback, they must hold a meeting to discuss the feedback and to share what they are going to do moving forward. This is powerful. I wish I could have completed a survey like this for other principals. This is the only school where I have had this opportunity, and I believe all schools should implement this process.

Before I held my meeting with my team, I shared a document of my data from the first and second semesters. If you click my data that I hyperlinked above, you will notice two surveys for spring. Because of the pandemic, many teachers did not complete the survey the first time. A different survey with the same questions was shared a second time. I compiled the data, added a reflection, and shared it with my team before we met. When we met, I told myself to keep my mouth closed. This was a time for me to listen. My team gave me great

feedback and supported my rationale/reflection I provided which was improving in the area of supporting teachers with co-planning, weekly data meetings, and teacher appreciation.

I am committed to showing my appreciation more and giving more praise but I also wanted to provide a perspective in the reflection I shared with my staff. My school started off as a small charter school with few grades and a small staff. Now, we are a large staff serving grades K-8, so it is harder to publicly praise everyone like the veteran staff was used to when the school was smaller. I also shared in our virtual meeting that this is the school where I have seen the most public praise in my entire career. Many of the teachers in my school have only worked at my school and did not have a comparison. The other thought I had is that we sometimes have to work hard to take actions we don't need. I don't care for public praise. I just need my principal to tell me one-on-one privately that I'm doing okay. However, words of affirmation, in public, is needed by some people. I have to remember that I have to meet everyone's needs.

I am most proud that during the entire school year my entire team believed I was open to constructive feedback and dealt with issues that need to be addressed. A leader must be a learner and willing to grow. That's how I operate, but I am also glad my team saw it. Sometimes you take action, but the people around you don't see it. My favorite comment was, "Always on schedule and to the point." This comment sums me up nicely.

When I think about my areas of growth, I think about what I can change. I felt bad about these coaching comments, "But it was good coaching when we were doing it" and "We do not discuss successes in each coaching opportunity." I know the first comment is in reference to February when we were doing WIDA ACCESS. I could not observe or coach because I was administering the test or monitoring the test. This has always been a frustration. How do we give standardized testing without disrupting the needed structures we have already put into place like coaching teachers? Once I got back to coaching, the pandemic happened. The second comment made me think about how to make sure teachers feel uplifted during each coaching session. I struggle with this. I had a previous principal that would refer to some teachers and their classrooms as dumpster fires. We can debate whether this is appropriate later, but what if it is that bad? How do you not crush someone's spirit to get better while at the same time growing him or her?

I don't have all the answers, and I'm not perfect. However, I wanted to be real and transparent with my readers. I have written numerous pieces about other administrators, and if I going to call other people to the carpet, I will call myself to the carpet also. Guess what? If you are an

administrator, and your school doesn't do this, you can create and send out an anonymous survey. Please don't forget the team debrief after you analyze the feedback. It is important for you and the team.

Although these surveys were anonymous, I know who said some of the comments because some commenters told me. I even know the identity of the one person who did not take the second spring survey. The person took the first one, and misread the directions requesting everyone take the second spring survey. One of the people who gave me needs improvement for some categories in the second spring survey called me and apologized after the team debrief. I was shocked. The person shared that the team debrief gave a different perspective of me and the person admitted to not really giving me a chance. I thanked this team member because it was a genuine heartfelt apology that did not have to happen. I'm looking forward to staying at my school next year and implementing my plan. At the end of the next school year, I will let you know how it went.