

## CASE ONE – INVOLVING TEACHERS IN EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS

### **THE COMMUNITY**

Davidtown is located in the heart of farming country in a Midwestern state. Unlike many similar towns, it has experienced steady growth. In part, this growth is attributable to the following conditions: (1) Davidtown is a county seat; (2) it has a hospital that serves a four-county area; (3) it has a Chamber of Commerce that has been successful in bringing five new companies to the community in the last ten years; (4) it is located on a major interstate highway; and, (5) it is the site of a public community college and a private four-year college.

The population of Davidtown is currently 24,300 – a 40 percent increase in twenty years. New subdivisions are being erected continuously and a new shopping mall opened just three years ago. A recent fact book about the state described Davidtown as a “prosperous, growing, middle-class community.”

A recent newspaper article highlighting community leaders noted that only one of five members of the city council had resided in Davidtown for more than ten years. This statistic exemplifies the changing demographics of the community. More importantly, it reflects the fact that the leadership in Davidtown is composed largely of individuals who have recently located there.

### **THE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

The boundaries for the Davidtown Community School District go beyond the town to include four rural townships. Thus, the student population still includes a number of children who live on farms. This fact is reflected in the composition of the school board:

- Joe Marshall, attorney (board president)
- Lisle Atwood, owner of a farm implement dealership
- Mary Ingalls, bank employee
- Jim Maighorn, farmer
- Lowell Ridovich, plant manager for a truck-trailer company
- Delores Simpson, housewife and part-time instructor at the community college
- Byron Trumski, farmer

The board members representing the rural areas of the district (Maighorn and Trumski) are both serving their third terms on the board. The other board members are all serving their first term.

The district includes a high school, two middle schools, and eight elementary schools. Four of the elementary schools are located in Davidtown and the other four are dispersed in the four outlying townships. Six of the school buildings have been erected or remodeled in the past fifteen years.

Will Guyberger has been superintendent of the Davidtown Community Schools for seven years. Prior to this appointment, he was the principal of Davidtown High School for eight years. Superintendent Guyberger is considered a competent leader and has many supporters in the community. The assistant

superintendent for business, Howard Grangal, has twenty-two years of experience in the district. However, Dr. Patricia McDowd, assistant superintendent for instruction, has been employed by the school district for only two years. It has only been in the past few years that the school system sought to recruit administrators from outside the system. The change in practice was prompted largely by demands made by new school board members who believed that the school district suffered from too much "inbreeding."

## **THE INCIDENT**

For the first time since Will Guyberger left the principalship of Davids town High School, the school was faced with the task of finding a new principal. Aaron Ketchie, who took over for Guyberger was retiring.

Forty-seven educators filed applications to become principal of the high school, including both assistant principals at the high school and the middle school principal. The task of coordinating the search for a new principal was delegated to Dr. McDowd, the assistant superintendent of instruction. Superintendent Guyberger believes in delegating responsibility and he does so often with his two assistants. Principals report directly to the assistant superintendent of instruction. Thus, assuming the responsibility for the search was congruent with the existing line-and-staff relationships.

Pat McDowd came to Davids town from a neighboring state two years ago. The vacancy at the high school constituted her first opportunity to employ a principal. She viewed this as an opportunity to bring new ideas to the leadership of the district. McDowd decided to advertise the position nationally in professional journals and newspapers -- something that had never been done before. The publicity generated a large applicant pool.

In conducting the screening of the written application materials, Pat conferred with both Guyberger and Grangal. She felt they both had a vested interest in the selection process, because they would be working closely with this person. Although neither campaigned directly for an individual candidate, it was apparent that they both favored employing someone from within the district.

Six candidates were selected as finalists, including one of the high school assistant principals and the middle school principal. Each accepted the invitation to interview. The interviews were conducted by McDowd, Guyberger and Grangal. At her request, an evaluation form was completed by all for each candidate. After the interviews, two of the candidates withdrew from the search, including the middle school principal. From the remaining four, McDowd recommended Dr. Sharon White, assistant principal at the laboratory school at the state university. She did so knowing that both of her colleagues favored the high school assistant principal. This was quite evident in their written assessments of the candidates.

Superintendent Guyberger, however, believes that delegation of authority will only be successful if the superintendent is willing to permit subordinates to make critical decisions. Additionally, he was impressed with Dr. White, but he didn't think she was better than the internal candidate. After weighing the matter, he decided to take the recommendation for White to the school board.

Sharon White became the first female secondary school principal and the youngest person (30) to ever be appointed to a principalship in the district. She recently completed her doctorate in educational leadership and her two years of experience at the laboratory school constituted her total years of experience in school administration. Prior to becoming an assistant principal, she taught English at a high school for five years.

The first semester at Davidtown High School was a successful and pleasant experience for the new principal. The faculty, students, and parents were quite impressed with her. Her pleasant personality and sincere enthusiasm made many skeptics forget about her youth. Even the two assistant principals who competed with her for the position became convinced that she was a most capable leader.

Sharon's style of leadership is distinctly different from that of her predecessors. She views herself as an instructional leader and devotes much of her time in interacting with teachers, students, and parents (e.g., visiting classrooms, attending virtually all of the extracurricular events). The management tasks were largely delegated to the two assistant principals; however, Dr. White maintained an active role in dealing with discipline problems.

In March, two high school faculty members indicated they would not be back for the following school year. After learning this, White sent information on a study to Dr. McDowd recommending approval to seek replacements and indicating a need for at least two additional positions in the fall due to increase in enrollment. The superintendent reviewed the request and granted the authorization to fill all four positions.

Traditionally, principals in Davidtown have been given the authority to select staff for their schools. Final decisions are subject to approval by McDowd and Guyberger who also interview the finalists. The principal submits a recommendation to McDowd and checks with Grangal regarding the funding for the positions, and then the superintendent gives final approval and sends it on to the school board.

In late April, Dr. White was in her office interviewing a candidate. At the same time, her secretary took a phone call from Guyberger requesting a time change for his turn in interviewing the same candidate the following day – from 3:00 p.m. to 10:30 a.m.

The secretary informed the superintendent that the change wouldn't be possible because at that time the math department would be interviewing the candidate.

The superintendent was shocked and wondered what the math department was doing being involved in the interviewing of the candidate. When he inquired about it the secretary told him that he would need to discuss it with the principal.

After ending his conversation with the secretary, Guyberger immediately called Grangal and asked him if he knew anything about teachers being involved in the interviews. He had asked Grangal because he seemed to always know what was happening around the district, but Grangal had no information about it at all and he added that if it was happening it was a bad management decision. With that, Guyberger called McDowd into his office and asked her if she was aware of the situation. McDowd responded that she had no knowledge of the situation and stated that White had not discussed it with her. She added that she didn't really think that teachers would be involved in the formal process in the hiring.

McDowd was instructed to investigate the situation after Guyberger shared his conversation with the high school secretary. He asked her to report back to him. Dr. McDowd quickly learned that Dr. White had decided to let the faculty play a role in the selection of new teachers. She had done so because: (1) the time had come to recognize teacher empowerment, and; (2) the process was employed at the lab school and proved successful. She told McDowd that she felt times were changing and teachers needed to have input into who their professional peers would be.

At this point, McDowd informed her that this was not an accepted practice at Davidtown. None of the other principals were doing it and the superintendent was concerned about the possible repercussions. This could lead to teacher involvement becoming an issue in collective bargaining. Teachers could demand that all principals use this practice. What would the school board think about this practice?

Dr. White explained that she had talked to the faculty about their roles in this process. They had informed her that they would not use this to try and force other schools to do the same. And she had told them that the recommendation for employment would be hers and she would assume all responsibility for it.

Dr. McDowd asked her if she had consulted with her two assistant principals before beginning this process and she told her that they had discussed it. She also admitted that they raised concerns privately about the process but that they thought it was her decision to make. They had informed her that no other school in the district used such a process. She ended by saying that she works best when she has the confidence of her faculty – when she trusts them and they trust her - and she wondered why McDowd didn't trust her with this decision.

Dr. McDowd reported the conversation to the superintendent. She dwelled on the fact that the principal's decision could cause problems in negotiations with the teachers' union. The issue of faculty participation in employment decisions had been discussed at the bargaining table for the last three years, and each time the board negotiator had taken a firm position that employment was a management right.

Guyberger commented that White was being naïve if she thought that the union would ignore this because some of her teachers had said so. He felt the union would use it in negotiations and point out that it had been successful. He also thought that the other principals in the district would be very upset when they learned about it. He and McDowd discussed the issue for quite a while and then they were joined by Grangal. Mr. Grangal participates in the negotiation process and he thought that they should contact the professional negotiator for the district, an attorney, and get his feelings on the matter. Unfortunately the negotiator was out of town for several days attending a seminar and was not available.

Grangal urged Guyberger to take immediate action to stop the process. They eventually all agreed on this. The two men wanted to send a letter of reprimand to Dr. White, feeling it would provide evidence that involvement of staff in the hiring process was not a practice condoned by the central administration. Dr. McDowd objected to sending a letter of reprimand. She thought that would be too harsh. The superintendent however sent the following letter:

Dr. Sharon White:

In that you decided to involve your faculty in employment interviews without consulting with your supervisor, and in that this decision involved a matter of dispute between the Davidtown Teachers' Association and the board of education, we find it necessary to issue this reprimand. This reprimand focuses solely on your judgment and actions in this matter. Issuing this letter is most difficult given that this problem is incongruent with your outstanding performance as principal over the last year. In the future, you should consult with the assistant superintendent for instruction and/or the superintendent on all decisions that have direct implication for either school board policy or negotiated agreements with the DTA.

W. Guyberger, Superintendent

Dr. McDowd agreed that something had to be done, but she was bothered by the method being employed. She asked the superintendent if he would consider a conference with the principal as an alternative to informing her in writing that she should not continue the practice.

The superintendent felt that they had to go on the record and suggested that she meet with Dr. White and try and explain why the letter was necessary. He felt she would understand that it would not be a reflection of the total job she was doing. He felt she had been doing a good job in all the other areas.