

Challenging Relational Scenarios in a Public School

A. School internal concerns

1. I've heard people say that conflict can help us to grow us as individuals and to grow as a team. How do we embrace this belief and engage conflict as a positive process?
2. Our staff feels that our administrator's expectations can never be satisfied. New duties get added but nothing gets taken away, and on top of it all, the expectations are not clearly defined.
3. How can one dissolve cliques and promote unity among teachers in a way that promotes authentic peace and unity?
4. What is the best way to deal with backbiting and gossip between students? Teachers and faculty?
5. How can we address ongoing judgmentalism among staff of various beliefs, convictions or perspectives? Among students due to differing parental values?
6. One of my main challenges as an administrator is dealing with people who seek to avoid discussing relational problems. They will sometimes express frustrations to me, and will suggest ways to address the problem. But when their emotions have subsided, they often decide to avoid going to the other person to resolve their differences. I try to help them realize that this "lull" is actually the best time to address the conflict since emotions have cooled. The majority of the time, however, they refuse to do the hard work of reconciliation by stating that they "don't like conflict."
7. How does a teacher engage with a member on the admin staff / front office that they only occasionally see or know, but who has become overly dictatorial and demanding of information, paperwork and responses. The staff member is the wife of the administrator and is seen as receiving special treatment and allowance rather than being accountable.
8. The classroom teacher has excellent management skills and her students are well-behaved *for her*. However, she observes their behavior during music class, and she jumps in during that class to address the behavior. This offends the music teacher (who believes she can take care of the students just fine). There is now conflict between the two teachers.
9. Students in the 6th grade have been making jokes about a student's Mexican nationality. This came to a climax during the 2016 election year, as many students were quoting President Trump "build a wall". Other remarks such as "you shouldn't be here" or "Go back to Mexico" were said. Most of the time these were said in an ignorant way by students making jokes about many different people in the classroom. How should the teacher or principal address this situation?
10. High school girls were using Instagram to make fun of a classmate's snap chat story. Other students began to comment on the Instagram post and added to the mockery. How should we address this?
11. Close to the end of the year, the administration must not renew a contract because only one position exists for two people. Consequently, one of the teachers feels offended. The one with "seniority" is not the strongest teacher and the position is given to the other teacher. The "older" teacher is not a bad teacher, just not nearly as strong as the younger / newer teacher. Even after the conversation, the teacher not being renewed is offended and felt that because of their years of experience they should have been kept over the other teacher. They believe that seniority should be the deciding factor. A relational conflict and tension develop between the teacher and the school administrator.
12. As the new administrator, I have heard many times, "that's not how we used to do it." I understand the need for consistency and longevity but I feel like a couple of staff don't want to change or grow. Any conversation about change leads to relational pull back and grumbling, with some staff beginning to criticize and critique any proposals that appear new. The admin team would like to just keep the peace

and not make a fuss. How do I confront and resolve the tension while creating a vision to move the school forward?

13. It is apparent to most people in our school that there is more value given to teachers than support staff, which is dispiriting to the support staff.
14. One of the main challenges in our school is how often students, parents and teachers will accuse the staff of favoritism. As Administrator and a teacher, I strive to treat all students and staff with equal respect and concern. But not all students have the same needs, and when we devote some extra time to a particular student or staff member, others sometimes see it as favoritism. This problem seems to be growing as our society becomes increasingly self-centered. I have one particular staff person that feels this way. It doesn't matter how much attention I give her, she still thinks that another staff person is "my favorite". How can we relay to the students and staff that they are all valuable even when some people require more time and support to do well.
15. Although teachers' responsibilities are clearly defined in their contracts and in the Faculty Handbook, some of them do not fulfill their responsibilities, such as having lesson plans done at the appointed time or taking playground duty when assigned.
16. In a team teaching environment, two of the intermediate teachers that have classrooms side by side, move the students back and forth between them and share a common teachers office, have become angry with each other to the point of not speaking. One sees the other as a slob who can not keep her office space tidy and organized while the other views her partner as a control freak who has unrealistic expectations. The tension is beginning to affect their interaction with the students and parents.
17. A colleague undermines your authority as a teacher. For example ... You are the new club sponsor that is in charge of a club at school. Another teacher on staff has students come to them asking questions about the club rules. The other teacher tells the students something different from what you, the new club sponsor, said. Even after you speak to the teacher, this continues throughout the year.
18. Excellence, defined by the administrator, is defined in terms of high SAT scores and winning sports teams. Excellence, defined by teachers, is shown by increasing ability and success in academics matters. How do we deal with these tensions and even use them for good?
19. What is the best way to handle a difficult situation with a student who is the child of an employee? Should one speak with the employee first or speak with the spouse so as not to involve the employee? Does the recommendation change if the employee is the child's teacher?

B. Schools and parents

1. A parent accuses a teacher of treating her child unfairly. She wants her child moved to another class. She says she has spoken to the teacher but does not believe what the teacher has communicated and instead believes her child's version of events. The teacher paints a very different picture of this child, and repeats to the principal the steps and opportunities she has taken to attempt to get this child to behave, which have been communicated to the parent as well.
2. When a disruptive student in a teacher's class is a daily problem, the teacher tries to address the concerns with the parent. However, the parent just insists that it is the teacher's fault and won't work to resolve the situation. The administrator steps in to try to help with relationships and be the buffer. The student probably needs to be tested but the parents aren't open to this option. How can either the teacher or the administrator engage the parents constructively?
3. Divorced parents who don't co-parent well and ask different things of school staff and have different expectations in regards to their children, and are constantly playing the staff against each other. No

teacher now wants to meet with the parents, who now feel disenfranchised and isolated from the staff. How should the staff engage these parents?

4. Parents of enrolled students are splitting up and begin to leverage various communication with the school. Each paints the other as a “bad parent” and shifts the conversation in that direction. Teachers and administrators are caught in the middle. Conversations become loaded with accusations and concerns, pulling teachers into siding with one or the other parent.
5. We have a situation where a math teacher has not done a good job of presenting lessons and a number of parents are upset and offended. After several observation-evaluations, she is starting to do better. But she has lost parent confidence. How do we help resolve this conflict to be fair to all parties: teacher, students, parents?
6. Parents have a sense of entitlement; because they pay for their child's education, they expect to be able to tell teachers what to do.
7. A student is accidentally hurt on the playground by another student when running. The injury required doctor's intervention. The parents of the hurt child wanted major consequences imposed on the other student in spite of the evidence. The parents of the hurt child were insistent, took this to the board, remained at school, and tried to impose revenge on the other child and parents since the school didn't do what they expected.
8. Same scenario as above except the a parents go right to an attorney and sue the school for negligence.
9. What is the best way to help parents encourage their children to be responsible for their actions, as well as, holding their children accountable?
10. Middle school girls that are "so sweet" but are actually being sneaky and conniving forming cliques and shunning other friends. Parents when confronted can't or won't believe this is a problem because “their daughters wouldn't do such things.”
11. How can I engage parents who expect progress at a rate inconsistent with their child's abilities (he has a learning difference) and blame his lack of progress on an incapable teacher?
12. A parent of an upper elementary student consistently blame other students in the class for her own child's misbehavior. When the issue is addressed and resolved, this parent finds another student (or the same one) to accuse of wronging their child.
13. A teacher disagreed with how an administrator handled a situation with a student, and went and spoke negatively of the administrator to office personnel.
14. Parent tells principal she saw a teacher at a concert and she looked drunk. When the principal talked with the teacher, he learned that she was on meds from illness (and had prescriptions to prove it). Should the principal simply report back to the parent or facilitate a conversation between the teacher and the parent?

C. Tensions with School Board

1. A teacher is the author of the language arts curriculum for their school. It was printed with errors that the teacher is now tasked to go back and correct. The school board believes every bad report it receives about the materials, but when the teacher asked for equal time to bring the board up to speed, she is told “no” and that the teacher has a bad attitude. How can the teacher engage with the administration and the board to resolve the tension and conflict?
2. Two board members bring their external conflicts into the board meetings, giving subtle jabs at each other crouched in humor but unsettling to the other board members. On several occasions, these two board members have lashed out at each other during some critical discussions about important board topics,

sidelining the board's ability to congenially discuss the issues or reach a decision. No one wants to confront either member and become embroiled in the conflict.

3. The board has become increasingly involved in the day to day operation and decisions of the school, violating their own policies and procedures. When this has been pointed out by the head of school, the board has fractured into several camps, one aligning with the head of school and wanting to pull back on their involvement, and the other siding with the board head, one of the school's founders. A consultant has been considered, but the board chair refuses to support that idea, saying this is only a misunderstanding which will pass in time.

E. Early education programs

1. In the staff, the part time staff, who are mostly very young or very old, feel like they are treated less than the full time staff who are mostly professional and middle aged. An environment of gossip and talking behind the backs of each group is beginning to grow, frustrating the program's warm faculty culture and undermining the unity of the preschool. Feelings of being unappreciated are consistently being expressed by the part time staff, many of whom because of their schedules, miss the staff meetings, staff team building times and general training times.
2. The program director has been spending far more time in her office and less out in the preschool classes and campus, probably due to an increased expectation to manage a growing children's program. Consequently, the staff is beginning to feel overlooked, detached and disconnected from the director. They are beginning to grumble and express concerns over a change in the preschool vision and mission (perceived or otherwise), leading to a significant drop in the staff morale. This has become very evident as teachers leave earlier than ever before, don't put in any extra hours or time at the school, and seem only willing to do the minimal expected.
3. A four year old's teacher got into a knock-down yelling match with a parent who mistakenly blamed the teacher for their child's lost toys brought to school in their lunch (they were later found at home). Parents and children were visibly upset, and the parent stomped off angry. Everyone is now on edge and afraid to talk to that parent or any of her friends, which there are many, or even bring up the topic which remains unresolved and filled with tension. Embarrassment seems to be part of the issue.

D. Athletics

1. In the athletic league for middle schools that we are part of, the president of the league is not paying referees. There seems to be misappropriation of funds, but many are reluctant to address the issue and create some major conflict. The situation is becoming a negative example that is shading all the schools in the league.
2. The high school football coach has many gifts and skills and does a great job in building a winning team. However, he often loses his temper with players and conveys inappropriate anger toward them with his tone of voice, body language and sometimes with vulgar language. After he calms down a while, he starts communicating appropriately again, but the students are on edge the rest of the practice or game out of fear of setting him off again. How could I, as a teacher in the school, approach him to encourage him to learn how to manage his anger? I think he would be an even better coach if he could overcome this characteristic.
3. We consistently have parents who demand that we field competitive, winning teams (play to win), while others demand that we field instructional teams with equal playing time (play to have fun and play everyone equally). Typically, we will hear from parents, "Why did/didn't your coach substitute all the

players?” or “Why aren’t you playing my kids more?” Parents become quite passionate about all sides of the issue.

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