Assignment #2: Comparing Unified and K-8 School Districts

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**Comparing Unified and K-8 School Districts**

As an educational leader, it is important to have a clear understanding of the different governance structures that are in place between different school districts. That way if an educational leader is assigned to a new district or gets hired at a new district they are prepared for the move. An educational leader needs to know the governance and structure of both a unified school district and a K-8 school district in order to be better prepared. It is also important for an educational leader to have a good understanding of the leadership practices and also stakeholder relations practices that are required for successful strategic planning in both types of school districts. The purpose of this paper is to compare the governance and structure that is required at both a unified school district as well as a K-8 district. The paper will achieve this by discussing the leadership practices that are necessary for the strategic planning process, and the different stakeholder relations that are needed to successfully operate within a diverse district. The paper will then discuss the relations that are necessary and that are required to keep a good learning infrastructure in place.

**Comparison between Unified School Districts and K-8 School Districts**

People within an educational setting must know and understand the governance and structure of both a Unified School District and a K-8 school district. The school districts that are being compared are from two different states. The unified school district is from the state of South Carolina. The reason why a school district that was either a high school district or a K-8 school district was not used from South Carolina is that all of the school districts in the state of South Carolina are considered a unified school district. The K-8 Districts that were used were from the state of California. With that said, there were not many differences between the structure and governance of a unified school district and that of a K-8 school district. In the State of South Carolina, all of the public schools are governed in the same manner and have the same type of hierarchy. The hierarchy is the Governor of the state, the state legislature, the Superintendent of Education for South Carolina, the SC Department of Education, each local school board for each school district, and the school district superintendent (South Carolina Department of Education, 2020). Each of these levels has a different set of responsibilities such as the legislature is responsible for passing laws that the South Carolina Department of Education and each local school board are responsible for adhering to the laws that are passed (South Carolina Department of Education, 2020). The governance structure for a K-8 school district in California is very similar to a unified school district in South Carolina. The reason is that the hierarchy for California is the Governor of the state, the state legislature, the Superintendent of Education for the state, the California Department of Education, and then the school board that is elected for the school district in question, and then the school district superintendent (California Department of Education, 2020).

When looking at the local level of structure and governance of both the unified school districts of South Carolina and the K-8 School Districts in California are both the same in regards to having a school board or board of trustees, a superintendent, school administrators, and then having committees that are used within the district to help make suggestions (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). In California, each K-8 school board is responsible for hiring the superintendent of education for the school district (Timar, 2004; Youssef, 2017).  In South Carolina, it has the same type of set up in regards to each school board having the responsibility to hire and evaluate the superintendent (Smith & Gasparian, 2018). In both South Carolina and California the school board for each state is the one that is in charge of having the authority, responsibility, govern and oversee the way that the schools are run and manage the public schools that operate in the districts in question (Timar, 2004; Smith & Gasparian, 2018). In both California and South Carolina the superintendent is the one that implements and monitors the plans that are put into place, the procedures that are being used, and working to achieve the results that are set forth by the stakeholders of the school districts (Timar, 2004; Smith & Gasparian, 2018). In other words, the superintendent in both states serves as the chief executive officer and top educational leader for the district and is in charge of all of the administrative responsibilities that are required within the school district.

At both types of school districts the principals at each individual schools within the districts serve in the role of instructional leaders of the schools in question, and is the administrator that is in charge of that location (Smith & Gasparian, 2018). As a result of being in charge of a school location the principal is the one that is in charge of ensuring the campus runs smoothly, student achievement, student discipline, staffing the location as permitted by the district superintendent, and planning and carrying out the day to day operations of the school location (Smith & Gasparian, 2018).

One of the governance structures that school districts have to deal with is the testing that is required by state or federal law. The school districts in both states are responsible for adhering to both state and federally mandated test. In California, there are multiple federal and state assessments that students are required to take starting at the third grade school level such as the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Assessments (California Department of Education, 2019). In South Carolina, there are also multiple state and federal assessments that students are required to take starting at the end of the third grade level such as South Carolina as the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (Royster & Saylors, 2017). The school districts are required to show progress of the students on the assessments that are given and both states are required to show that they are monitoring the progress by producing a report card for each school within the district (California Department of Education, 2019; Royster & Saylors, 2017). In both states if students do not show mastery or pass the assessments then they can be held back in their grade level.

**Common Leadership Practices Required for Strategic Planning**

It is extremely important to understand that regardless of the type of school district that is being looked at such as a unified school district, K-8 school district, or even a union high school district that strategic planning is necessary for the district to be successful. A strategic plan is a way that an organization can identify its strategy, setting the direction that is going to be taken, and making choices on where to put resources to achieve the goals that are being worked towards (Papke-Shields & Boyer-Wright, 2017). A strategic plan also allows an organization to gather and analyze data and then make decisions that are based upon the data to help grow or improve the organization (Demir, Kim, Current, & Jahnke, 2019). Some of the best leadership practices that are needed for good strategic planning is having good communication, good collaboration, and building good relationships (Taylor, Santiago, & Haynes, 2019).

One of the best leadership practices that are required for strategic planning is that of having good communication. Educational leaders need to have good communication in place with the stakeholders to have good strategic planning in place. By having good and open communication in place then it can help build trust with all of the stakeholders of the organization (Baker, Mathis, Stites-Doe & Javadian, 2016). Having good communication in place allows school leadership to provide the stakeholders of the organization with information that is important for the success of the organization. Having good communication in place also helps keep from wrong information from being spread that could hurt the process of strategic planning or incorrect information from causing stakeholders to be upset or stressed out (Renata, 2015). It is also important to understand that if stakeholders feel that they can trust the leadership of an organization then they will be more likely to be involved with the organization going forward. In other words, a leader needs to be able to have good communication in place to keep stakeholders informed to help build trust and as a result, have the stakeholders more involved in the strategic planning process.

Another component of strategic planning that is important for successful strategic planning is for building relationships with stakeholders. Having good relationships with the stakeholders and having a good understanding of the stakeholders of an organization is important for the overall success of strategic planning (Ng, 2019). The leadership of an organization has to build environments in which the stakeholders feel that they can have input, are safe, and are important to the success of an organization (Vescio, 2016). Organizational leaders that have good relationships in place with all of the stakeholders can create an environment in which everyone is working together for the success of the organization (Benn, O'Leary & Abratt, 2016).

Another important leadership practice that is important for strategic planning is having collaboration in place with all of the stakeholders of the organization to address the strategic plans that are in place. The reason is that strategic planning takes teamwork and as a result collaboration is important for the stakeholders of the organization (Lockwood, Dillman & Boudett, 2017). The leadership of a school district needs to have a good blueprint in place for collaboration to be successful and monitor the plans to see if plans need to be made to allow for better collaboration to take place between all of the stakeholders.

**Stakeholder Relation Practices Necessary for Success in Diverse Districts**

It is important to understand that regardless of a school district being either a unified school district or a K-8 school district the practices would be the same to have a district to be successful in diverse districts. An important role for educational leaders to have successful stakeholder relations in place is by having good collaboration in place to help build trust to get all of the stakeholders involved with working with the school district (Constantino, 2012). Some things could cause stakeholders to not want to be involved in the school districts and that is economic status, culture differences, language barriers, and even education levels of the various stakeholders (Wanat, 2010). One of the best ways to eliminate these barriers is to have plans in place via the strategic plans that can reduce or even eliminate the barriers. An example of a way to reduce or eliminate barriers is when a school district identifies an issue in which parents are not sure how they can be involved and help out. A school district could reduce this type of barrier by creating a program that helps stakeholders learn more about the school and how they can be a help to the school (Poynton, Kirkland & Makela, 2018).

Educational leader's most important relation practices that are necessary for success in diverse districts are having good communication in place. There are multiple ways that school leaders should use to communicate with various stakeholders. One method that has grown recently is a digital communication and other technology-based communication such as social media, websites, and even e-mail communication (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). However, it is important that educational leaders also use other forms of communication to communicate with all of the stakeholders due to the possibility of some stakeholders not having access to these forms. In other words, educational leaders have to also use phone calls or phone blasts, letters home, or other methods that could ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be reached. When educational leaders connect with the stakeholders it is a way to keep them engaged and to have them included in the different processes of the school. It is also important that educational leaders be aware that the communication that is being used is done in a manner that allows the school and school district to present itself in the best way possible and is accurately communicating with the stakeholders

**Conclusion**

Educational leaders must have a good understanding of the different governance structures that are in place between different school districts. Having this understanding can allow an educator to have a better overall understanding of the education system as a whole. When an educator has a good understanding of how the different school districts operate across the country then they will see that they all have very similar governance and structures in place. Educational leaders will also notice that even though school districts might have different grade levels they all require strategic planning to take place for them to be successful. An educational leader that understands the importance of strategic planning will also understand that having good plans in place can help with having better relationships with every stakeholder of an educational organization.

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