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Collaboration Issues—Administration

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I wanted to get a different perceptive from the one person on the administration team whose sole job it is to make sure that students and families have the resources they need to thrive both in and out of school. So, I decided to interview our school Social Worker. Unlike the Principal, our Social Worker has been employed at the school for many years and I wanted to get her seasoned perceptive. I was mostly interested in how the policy that the Principal has implemented has affected her work with students and families.

Mia-lon Washington is our school Social Worker. Mrs. Washington originally went to college to be a lawyer but found the classes boring. Instead, she decided to focus on Sociology and after graduating from college her first job was at the Marion County Juvenile Court where she was a juvenile probation officer. At that time, the juvenile court had a continuing education program sponsored by the I.U. School of Social Work at IUPUI which paid for 1 year of master's in social work. She got into the program, took the courses and earned her MSW in 1983. She immediately began working in schools. She’s been at George Washington for the last ten years and has seen seven new Principals and even more Administrators cycle in and out of the school.

I asked her the following questions about her experiences:

What are your hopes for the students you work with?

She wants the families and students she works with to be safe, comfortable and happy. She would like to see every student that walks through the doors to be successful and graduate from high school. She wants all students to work toward positive goals and fully understand their own self-worth.

What challenges have you experienced while working with families?

The biggest challenge she’s experienced over the years with families has been facing the realization that people come from different backgrounds and have different beliefs that they pass on to their children. Oftentimes, her belief versus the parent’s beliefs causes a great deal of frustration. Being able to understand that distinction has been a huge challenge for her.

While she truly feels that most parents do the best they can, there are those parents that feel that when their children become teenagers that they no longer need parenting. The teenage years can be the most challenging for parents and children. However, she feels that parents need to pay even more attention to their teens, monitor their activities more effectively and be very active participants in their child’s lives during this critical phase.

What are some of the successes that you've experienced?

She mentioned that she’s had students come to visit her years later and thank her for helping them. It makes her feel as though there is a purpose behind what she does. She’s even been nominated for school social worker of the year by two of her former principals. Most rewarding is when she sees a silly, middle school student transform into a hardworking upper-classman it really makes her feel good.

What challenges have you experienced while working within the school systems (i.e with administrators, teachers or others)?

She mentioned that over the years she has worked with strong administrators and weak ones. Good administrator help contribute to creating a family atmosphere where everybody was willing to work together to benefit students and families. She stated that these were the most rewarding and successful times in her career. She talked about the fact that communication was one of the most important factors as well as clear, consistent policies and expectations. She said this is definitely vital to maintain an effective school.

However, she doesn’t feel like that is the case with the newly appointed Principal. The teacher morale is at an all-time low and many have given up. The students feel as if no one cares about them or their education and she said this this is challenging to witness because she has never seen it like this before. She shared with me she’s even applied for and hopes that very soon she will be leaving on medical leave.

This interview really instilled my faith that there are really great people working toward the success of students and parents. We need social workers in the school because teachers are focused on teaching and administrators are focused on the administration of the building. However, the social worker is the one person everyone calls on when a student or family member is experiencing hardship. I’m glad our families have someone who is experienced, knowledgeable and caring that they can go to in their time of need. But I am saddened because she’s lost her faith and is looking for a way out.