

Teaching Case Studies: The Role of Leadership

The following case studies are based in the school systems described below:

The town of Arlstone has five schools K-6 with 2500 students and the Arlstone/Boilton Regional School District has two schools 7 & 8 and 9-12 with 2200 students from both towns. Two of the elementary schools and both secondary schools are situated in Arlstone in a campus arrangement. The remaining three are some distance from campus, although two sit next to each other, separated by a field. Boilton has one school, the elementary school and is a separate school system for that one school. At the elementary level in Arlstone parents can choose which school in Arlstone their children will attend but must also indicate a second and third selection.

Like all school districts in this state, there is local control of education. The state provides direct financial support to cities and towns and regional school districts through a formula that reflects the property wealth of a community, and offers grants which generally come from federal funds. The rest comes from local taxes.

By state law, voters need to approve any additional tax levy above 2.5% increase in the annual budget. Open Town Meeting is the form of local government. This is a community of highly educated townspeople many of whom work in the technology industry.

The state also mandates a core curriculum accompanied by high stakes tests. There is an instructional technology standard for students but it is recommended but not required.

The districts have an approved technology plan, by both the school boards and the state (required to get any grant funding).

The school districts, despite spending less than many comparable communities, on education, get surprisingly good results academically, on the high stakes tests, in college admissions and on the playing field.

Case 1. The Challenge of New Leadership

Patricia Kolman has just been appointed Director of Instructional Technology for the Arlstone and the Arlstone/Boilton Regional School District. Her duties include planning, policy recommendation, budgeting, purchasing, supervising the use of instructional technology and the network and the people who are the support personnel in her office.

Patricia has lived in Arlstone for many years (her two boys went to the local schools). She was working as a technology aide in a neighboring community when the Superintendent, Irene Kenmore offered her the position of Curriculum and Technology Integration Specialist (CTIS) for the Arlstone schools. This position was one of the first of its kind in the state. The convenience of being in town with her children and the reputation of the schools made the decision no challenge at all for Patricia. She was an early supporter of technology as a tool for learning. She has seen the effects on her own children. The phrase "passionate about technology" applies to her.

As the Curriculum and Technology Integration Specialist, she worked with elementary teachers, planning units with them, modeling teaching with technology, troubleshooting, providing official professional development opportunities, etc. Patricia also served on both the Citizens Technology Advisory Committee to the Superintendent (CTAC) and the small K-12 technology leadership team inside the school districts. At the end of her fourth year, the Irene Kenmore, who hired her and who was a supporter of technology in the schools retired. After Irene left, Patricia remained in her position for three years but just now has been promoted. She accepted the promotion because despite the challenges and stresses, she felt she would be in a position to influence and direct the use of technology in the school districts. Patricia is certified as a teacher in the state but not as a Director of Instructional Technology. At the same time she is in a doctoral program at a nearby university, finishing her last two courses.

During the intervening three years, several important events have occurred. The new Superintendent, Warren Rose, who had been the Assistant, while not hostile to the instructional role played by technology, has no particular passion for it. Warren sees its value for data collection and reporting, payroll and all the other managerial functions such as attendance and communication. But with regard to the curricular use of technology (professional development, integration into teaching practice), he leaves the leadership to the person in the Technology Director's position, now Patricia.

Patricia's mentor, Jeffrey Conant, the man who held the Director position preceding and during the incumbency of Irene Kenmore and the intervening three years has just died, unexpectedly. So Patricia is new to the position and a veteran in the school districts. She has watched support decline both in terms of centrality to the Superintendent and also financially, given the economic downturn. She has also lost the counsel of

Jeffrey, a person with whom she could share concerns and potential solutions.

Patricia now supervises three Curriculum and Technology Integration Specialists, a secretary and a technical network coordinator who also maintains the districts' website and intranet. All of these people (except the secretary) were her peers.

Her current budget for both school districts, including technology personnel salaries (providing both technical and instructional support to educators) and all other technology functions: maintenance, new and replacement equipment and software, is \$800K which may or may not be increased by 5% (\$40K) in next year's budget.

The Town of Arlstone is looking to the electorate for a \$4M override, that is, supplementary to the annual budget request, an unusually high amount to be requesting at any time. Of that \$4M, \$500,000 is earmarked for technology, as a result of pressure on the Superintendent Rose from one segment of the community and some members of the Board.

The money, following the trend in the state to support one to one wireless computing, is for students in grades 7, 8 and 9, the start of a plan to give every student (and educator) ubiquitous access. The \$500,000 will be supplemented by grants and gifts from the corporate community, parents and other residents, a model being used in other parts of the state and nation, and supported by many legislators.

Success is not guaranteed; what is certain is that there will be a great deal of campaigning, both pro and con, with many night meetings, at which Patricia will have to defend the request for funding she firmly believes in. She will have to answer detailed financial questions, technical questions, write some newsletter articles and reports and contribute to Superintendent Rose's preparation for his presentation to the town voters at annual Town Meeting.

She will have to make the case that one to one computing contributes significantly to student achievement. Further complicating but actually ameliorating this process is that the town of Boilton will also need an override but a much smaller one and this town has a history of approving school expenditures with very little controversy. On the other hand, the town of Arlstone usually has contentious Town Meetings,

There are labs in all the schools, there is an elementary technology curriculum, some classrooms have multiple computers. The new high school renovation included several stationary labs. The same is true of the new elementary building. Part of the issue is that technology practice is not consistent among schools, grades and teachers and the funds, if approved, will address only some of this inequity.

Patricia knows that without the \$500K which is in the ballot question, all her plans to reinvigorate the school districts' technology resources and

programs and once again position Arlstone and Boilton as leaders in technology integrated education in the state, will fail.

For the instructor:

The objectives of this case are:

1. To understand the multiple and competing demands on leadership
2. To learn to think strategically
3. To make decisions based on professional priorities and data
4. To understand the complexity of educational decision-making
5. To understand the political nature of education funding

Some questions to consider:

1. What are the key issues in this case? Whose issues are they? Why?
2. What constraints, opportunities are there? Why?
3. Who are the key players and with whom should she collaborate?
4. How should she characterize to the various constituencies the potential losses and gains (pros and cons) the school districts face if the override succeeds or fails?
5. What additional information would you have liked in order to analyze this case?