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A Central Administration Internship in the Grand Rapids Public School System

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A CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION INTERNSHIP
IN THE
GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

by

Ronald F. Fite

A Project Report
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment
of the
Specialist in Education Degree

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Ronald F. Fite

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A PROPOSAL FOR INTERNSHIP
IN THE GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Background Information and Rationale for Internship

The professional experiences in the educational field of this educator have been with only one school system, Allegan Public Schools, and those experiences have occurred while in the following positions:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Grade level</u>	<u>Time</u>
1971-75	Junior High School Principal	7 - 9	4 yr.
1971	Interim Community School Director	Adult	4 mo.
1969-71	Assistant High School Principal	10 - 12	2 yr.
1966-69	High School English Teacher	10 - 12	3 yr.
1966	(Winter) Student Teacher	10 - 12	4 mo.
1965	Bus Driver	K - 12	4 mo.

During the ten years with Allegan Public Schools, experiences have been broad and varied. While in the administrative positions, Allegan Public Schools Team Management Concept has been practiced. This educator has learned and practiced numerous technical, conceptual, and human relations skills, but strongly feels that an experience in another school system will be highly beneficial. Most of the experiences at Allegan have been in administration, but usually at a specific level, rather than from a broad perspective as in central administration. Grand Rapids, much larger than Class "B" Allegan, offers a wide variety of such experiences for administrative and educational leadership skills development.

The Proposed Grand Rapids Experience

The proposed specific areas of experience will include:

1. Central Administration Decision-making
2. Alternative Educational Program Development
3. Personnel Procedures and Practices
4. Educational Park Program
5. Budget Development and Administration
6. Supply and Distribution Policies and Procedures
7. Transportation Program
8. Plant Planning and Development
9. Maintenance and Custodial Programs
10. Curriculum Development Program
11. Computer Programming and Data Processing

The areas listed above will serve as a guide to explore and compare administrative areas that are common to most school districts.

The Grand Rapids Public School System is a large and progressive school system, offering a wide variety of programs and available experiences. Mr. Thomas Neat, Director of the Educational Park Program in the Grand Rapids Public School System, will supervise and coordinate the internship experiences during the Summer, the period of time to be concurrent with the 1975 Western Michigan University Summer Session.

The primary objective during the internship is the development of specific skills. Skills to be developed include:

1. Technical Skills
 - a. Understanding budgeting procedures

- b. Organizing and directing custodial programs
 - c. Organizing and directing transportation programs
 - d. Understanding curriculum change and development
 - e. Understanding supply and distribution procedures
 - f. Understanding short and long-range plant planning and development
 - g. Understanding personnel screening and review procedures
2. Conceptual Skills
- a. Understanding the central administration decision-making process
 - b. Understanding the workings of the public school system hierarchy
 - c. Clarifying the role and duties of the educational leader
3. Human Relations Skills
- a. Developing competencies in communication
 - b. Developing a favorable environment for staff
 - c. Showing friendliness and understanding

The above skills will be developed by working and consulting in the eleven experience areas listed previously. Evaluation will be done through the summary from the daily log, from input from the organization supervisor, and by the Western Michigan University faculty sponsor and faculty advisor.

SKILLS DEVELOPED DURING THE INTERNSHIP

The primary objective of the internship was to develop specific skills in three areas, technical, conceptual, and human relations. The broad range of skills to be developed and the short length of time spent in the internship limited the extent that specific skills could be developed, but some time was spent in developing all the skills listed in the original proposal for the internship.

In the area of technical skills development, time was spent with numerous central administrative personnel in meeting the objectives.

Skills in understanding of budgeting procedures were achieved by spending eight days in the Business Affairs Department. Experiences included going through the Budget Workbook provided for the Board of Education in a work session, and spending a day each with supervisory personnel in general accounting, payroll, school investments, special funds, purchasing, insurance, and food services. The Grand Rapids Public School System owns and operates its own computer and data processing center, and the total financial records and budget are kept on the computer. Six days were spent with personnel in the computer center.

Experiences which developed skills in the organization and directing of custodial, maintenance, and transportation programs involved working with the Chief Officer of Operation Support Services, and with three supervisors who work under him. Time was

spent in the central office and also throughout the district where the programs were in progress.

Skills in understanding supply and distribution procedures were developed by observing procedures used in purchasing, noting the processes in keeping records and inventories through the computer center, visiting the service building and observing methods of ordering, distributing, and storing inventory, and by studying Board of Education policies in regard to purchasing.

Developing skills in understanding curriculum change and development was limited to curriculum change and development within two alternative school programs. Two alternative programs were studied from their beginnings to their current status, Walbridge Academy and Educational Park. Both schools had Summer programs in progress which were observed.

Experiences which developed skills in understanding short and long-range plant planning and development were coordinated through working with the Director of Educational Facilities Planning. Buildings which are currently under construction were visited, meetings were observed, citizens committee recommendations for future needs were studied, and strategy meetings to get future building programs underway were attended.

One week was spent with the Director and the Assistant Director of Personnel in developing skills in understanding personnel screening and review procedures. During the week numerous job applicant interviews were held, for both professional and supportive service

personnel. Negotiated contracts were reviewed to learn the restrictions under which personnel could be promoted, dismissed, disciplined, or transferred.

Both conceptual and human relations skills were developed throughout the internship. The conceptual skills of understanding the central administration decision-making process, understanding the workings of the public school system hierarchy, and clarifying the role and duties of the educational leader were interrelated. The human relations skills of developing competencies in communications, developing a favorable environment for staff, and showing friendliness and understanding were also closely related.

The administration decision-making process, the public school system hierarchy, and the educational leader role were better understood and clarified as a result of being in a formal Board of Education Meeting, meeting both formally and informally with members of the Board of Education and administrative personnel in committee meetings, noting the relationships of supervisors and subordinates, and observing personnel in various positions in the central administration offices throughout the Summer.

Developing competencies in communication, developing a favorable environment for staff, and showing friendliness and understanding are areas where Grand Rapids administrative personnel are continually trying to improve skills. The use of the written memo, the obvious and outgoing friendliness, and the genuine concern for service to those who are within the organization and those who are outside the

organization cannot help but influence anyone who spends a Summer internship in the Grand Rapids Public Schools.

In summary, the following specific skills were developed or improved as a result of the Summer Internship:

1. Technical Skills: Understanding budgeting procedures, organizing and directing custodial and transportation programs, understanding curriculum change and development, understanding supply and distribution procedures, understanding short and long-range plant planning and development, and understanding personnel screening and review procedures.
2. Conceptual Skills: Understanding the central administration decision-making process, understanding the workings of the public school system hierarchy, and clarifying the role and duties of various educational leadership (administrative) positions.
3. Human Relations Skills: Developing competencies in communication, developing a more favorable environment for staff, and showing friendliness and understanding.

The value of the Summer internship, in terms of experiences which led to the development of skills as outlined in the original proposal, was greater than the intern had expected when the Summer began. The experiences were both satisfying and fulfilling.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE INTERNSHIP

Under the original proposal, which delineated many experiences in an attempt to develop skills in understanding the total central administration operation in a large school district, it is difficult to make many significant recommendations.

The internship fell short of expectations in that the intern was unable to make a significant contribution to the organization. To have been able to make such a contribution would mean spending more time in one specific area, but to have done so would have restricted the number of experiences, and, in following the original proposal, would have made meeting the outlined objectives very difficult, if not impossible.

For an intern whose desire to make a significant contribution to the organization is greater than his desire to be involved in a wide variety of experiences, the original proposal should be limited in the breadth of experiences suggested.

The one area where improvement could be made is at the beginning of the internship. It would be helpful if the intern could know that the internship had been approved and coordinated with all personnel with whom he would be working. While no specific problem arose that the intern was aware of, some anxiety could have been avoided if it had been known in advance that those with whom the intern was to work were informed well in advance of the experience.

WEEKLY SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCES

Week #1, July 1 - 3, 1975

Mr. Thomas Neat, Director of Educational Park in the Grand Rapids Public School System, the organization supervisor for the internship, explained and reviewed the Grand Rapids Public Schools administrative hierarchy, and discussed the experiences that would be available during the 1975 Summer. Mr. Neat assigned the intern a desk, and made other conveniences available for the Summer internship.

The internship experience moved to the Data Processing Center, where Mr. Ray Hoag, Assistant Director of Data Services, explained the work of the center from a broad perspective, and then set up appointments with ~~nine~~ other data processing specialists for the following week.

Time was made available to visit the thirteen secondary schools, four senior high schools, and nine junior high/middle schools, to learn the general location and attendance areas, and the type and size of each building.

It was immediately evident that Mr. Neat understood and used well his communication skills in the administration hierarchy in setting up experiences for the intern. He understood who could give him quick decisions on where experiences were available.

Week #2, July 7 - 11, 1975

The week was spent in the Data Processing Center, as time was set aside to meet with nine different data processing specialists. In each session the specialist explained the services provided and demonstrated the equipment and programs available. Follow-up visits to departments and facilities served were made in some cases. Each specialist took time to answer questions about the operation from his point of view, gave a brief history of his background and training, the structure of the organization, and what he perceived as his specific place and role in the organization. In general, all were candid in commenting on the advantages and disadvantages of the organization, and their relationships with their immediate supervisor.

Areas covered in the computer center during the week included the total operations area, personnel applications, instructional terminals, planning and evaluation services, supply and distribution procedures, K-12 student services and student data, financial/budgeting applications, and junior college services.

The history showing the development of the Educational Park was also covered during the week, and included the initial study recommendation through the current program. From this study it was possible to understand how the curriculum was developed, and how the idea for this particular program in alternative education was conceived and developed.

The role and duties of various educational leaders were

observed during the week, mostly in the business area of the computer center. The decision-making process was observed, and it was noted that numerous people were involved at various levels. Lower level employees sometimes complained when a decision or answer from a higher level was difficult to obtain quickly.

Week #3, July 14 - 18, 1975

The week was spent in the Data Processing Center, Alternative Education Programs, and at the Supply and Distribution Center.

One final day was spent in the governmental services area of the computer center. Governmental services is concerned with providing services to other governmental units outside the school system, and thereby generating additional funds for the Grand Rapids School System. Numerous governmental units in three counties are now being served.

Alternative educational programs are a strength of the Grand Rapids School System. The Walbridge Academy, as one example, is operating for one hundred Title I students during a four-week summer session. Most of the students who attend are behavioral problems from other schools. Administrative decision-making procedures for the placement of a student in Walbridge Academy were observed, and behavioral modification techniques used were noted. The basic motivational techniques for individual student achievement were a token economy program and a fixed interval reward for attendance.

One day was spent in observing supply and distribution policies

and procedures, and noting some maintenance programs as in operation at the Board of Education Service Building.

Week #4, July 21 - 25, 1975

Mr. Darrel Weller, on special assignment to the Superintendent, became the contact person in the area of transportation during the week, and Mr. James Gallagher, Assistant Superintendent for Business Affairs, was the coordinator of experiences in the business area.

During the week it was possible to observe and discuss the organization of the transportation program, and to see the Summer transportation program in progress. Approximately one-half of the one hundred thirty-six buses were in use at some time during the Summer programs.

Mr. Ross Hill, Supervisor of Transportation and an employee of G.R.P.S. for thirteen years, explained the scheduling and dispatching procedures in coordinating the school transportation program. He also discussed the union to which bus drivers belong, explaining some provisions contained in the contract.

Mr. Gallagher took the intern through the same training program in budget preparation and development that the Board of Education members receive each year.

Central administration decision-making was observed in various committee meetings, including the formal meeting of the Finance Committee, where the role and duties of the administrator were observed in relationship to Board of Education Members.

Decision-making in investments was observed as one and one-half million dollars was invested in commercial paper and certificates of deposit as permitted by State School Law.

Week #5, July 28 - August 1, 1975

The entire week was spent in various areas of the Business Affairs Department. Operation of food services for the school system was seen at the actual operation in individual schools to the purchasing (including opening some sealed bids for specific food items) and distribution of food items.

Time was spent with security personnel, learning procedures and communication lines used in the day to day security operation, and in follow-up, time was given to understanding the school insurance packages, including theft, vandalism, and liability, all related to the security area.

Each day of the week was spent with a supervisor of a specific area in the Business Affairs Department. During the week the intern met once more with the Finance Committee Members, as they readied their recommendations for an up-coming Board of Education meeting.

Methods of communication and problem-solving were observed during the week when an unauthorized purchase, made by an employee in the Purchasing Department, was discovered by a Board of Education member and reported to the Superintendent of Business Affairs.

Week #6, August 4 - 8, 1975

The week was spent in four basic areas. First, some time was

spent following up budget items in the Business Affairs Department, and in following the Finance Committee's recommendation through to Board of Education approval.

The second area was in observing decision-making in the Board of Education meeting, and noting the administrative decision-making that preceded formal Board of Education action.

This helped in clarifying the role and duties of the educational leader in relationship to the Board.

The third area was in personnel practices and procedures, where only a short amount of time was spent, and the fourth area (where most time was spent during the week) was in plant planning and development.

Both short and long term planning were observed, crash programs to solve immediate problems, and the evaluation and utilization of present facilities. Cooperative usage of buildings and the scheduling of rooms were also a part of the week.

Week #7, August 11 - 15, 1975

The total week was spent in the Personnel Department with Mr. Donald Schriemer and Mr. Walter Monson, Director and Assistant Director, respectively.

Personnel procedures and guidelines were learned and observed, as interviews, transfers, evaluations, and placements were going on continually throughout the week.

Much time was spent in up-dating contracts, assignments, and

payroll as preparations for the opening of school progressed.

In making decisions in personnel, numerous things were considered. The contracts with various employee groups had to be followed, recommendations from people within and without the organization had to be considered, qualifications and skills had to be judged, budget allocations were checked and political ramifications were noted.

Assignment letters for the 1975-76 school year were completed and mailed out to approximately 2,000 teachers during the week, and secretaries and directors were continually responding to questions regarding the job market in all areas of the organization.

Week #8, August 18 - 22, 1975

Two areas took most of the time during this final week of the internship. The majority of time was spent with Mr. Patrick Sandro, Chief Officer of Operational Support Services.

The organization of the custodial, maintenance, and transportation programs were discussed and observed, as were organizational procedures and channels of communication.

Experiences involved working in the central administration office as well as visiting where specific programs were in progress. Numerous meetings were held throughout the week with supervisory personnel in making decisions and giving directions in order to have as many things as possible ready when school opens.

One-half day was spent in traveling to Lansing to seek State Fire Marshall approval for some structural modifications to an

existing building where an alternative education program will be housed during the 1975-76 school year.

Some time was spent in a meeting with the Directors of Secondary Education as they met with all secondary principals and prepared for the opening of the 1975-76 school year.