

CINDY OSBORNE

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EAD 801

MSU FINANCIAL AID OFFICER

I have learned over the course of the last few months that effective leadership takes many forms, but what I have also learned is that working within all six ISLLC standards has been a daily occurrence without my realization of these standards. Consequently, I will explore how I have been and can be an effective leader as a higher education financial aid officer utilizing all six of the ISLLC standards.

ISLLC Standard 1 “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.” (DoDEA Pacific, 2010)

Setting a personal vision is my first goal toward effective leadership in addition to MSU’s vision of “Advancing Knowledge and Transforming Lives” (MSU, 2010), and Office of Financial Aid’s vision to “facilitate student recruitment, enrollment, and retention at Michigan State University.” (MSU-OFA, 2010) My personal vision consists of finding resolution to student financial conflicts, such as, little or no parental support, monetary expenses outside the norm and unexpected personal emergencies. My vision also entails removing the financial concerns of students that would then allow more concentrated effort in their own learning. It is also imperative that students understand their financial circumstances and to ensure they know this, I have incorporated outreach into my daily tasks. The ideal of outreach is to visit student classrooms outlining

financial aid availability and the requirements students must maintain to guarantee funding. This includes completing all their classes each semester with a minimum 2.0 GPA. Outreach also includes presentations at high schools around the state of Michigan in order that high school students and their parents understand the enormity and importance of obtaining a college degree. My personal vision for the future is that every student that desires higher education will have the funding necessary to complete their dreams and give back to the community all they have learned.

ISLLC Standard 2 “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.” (DoDEA Pacific, 2010)

It is not readily clear to those outside the Office of Financial Aid that I take Standard 2 seriously and work diligently toward these goals. School culture is very important to our office and me especially. I came to MSU from another Big Ten school simply because I believe the culture of learning, as well as the culture of community, is more closely knit at MSU and that my desire of enhancing my leadership abilities would be more readily attainable.

Our office advocates involvement in university functions. Our officers regularly mingle with students during lunch in their cafeterias, getting to know the students and answering their questions. I have volunteered each year to welcome students and help them move into their dorm rooms on Freshmen Move-In Day. It is important to me to be a visible presence to students and believe it will contribute to my effectiveness as a leader and an impetus to my authority and knowledge on financial aid. Nurturing

students at MSU is not just the domain of counseling services. It is necessary that financial aid officers be able to guide students throughout their educational experiences. I become, in effect, their surrogate parent or older sibling. I am, in many cases, their extended family. I must be objective when working with individual students, but I must also be willing to listen, to determine what the underlying cause to their financial problem is and find resolution. Not only does the student mature to a responsible adult through nurturing, but I continue to mature with them and it is this satisfaction that spurs me on to helping the next freshman that enters my office. Counseling a student as a freshman and then congratulating them upon graduation is conducive to my professional growth. But, I have not yet fully reached my potential and exercising the ISLLC standards will allow me to continue on this path toward that goal.

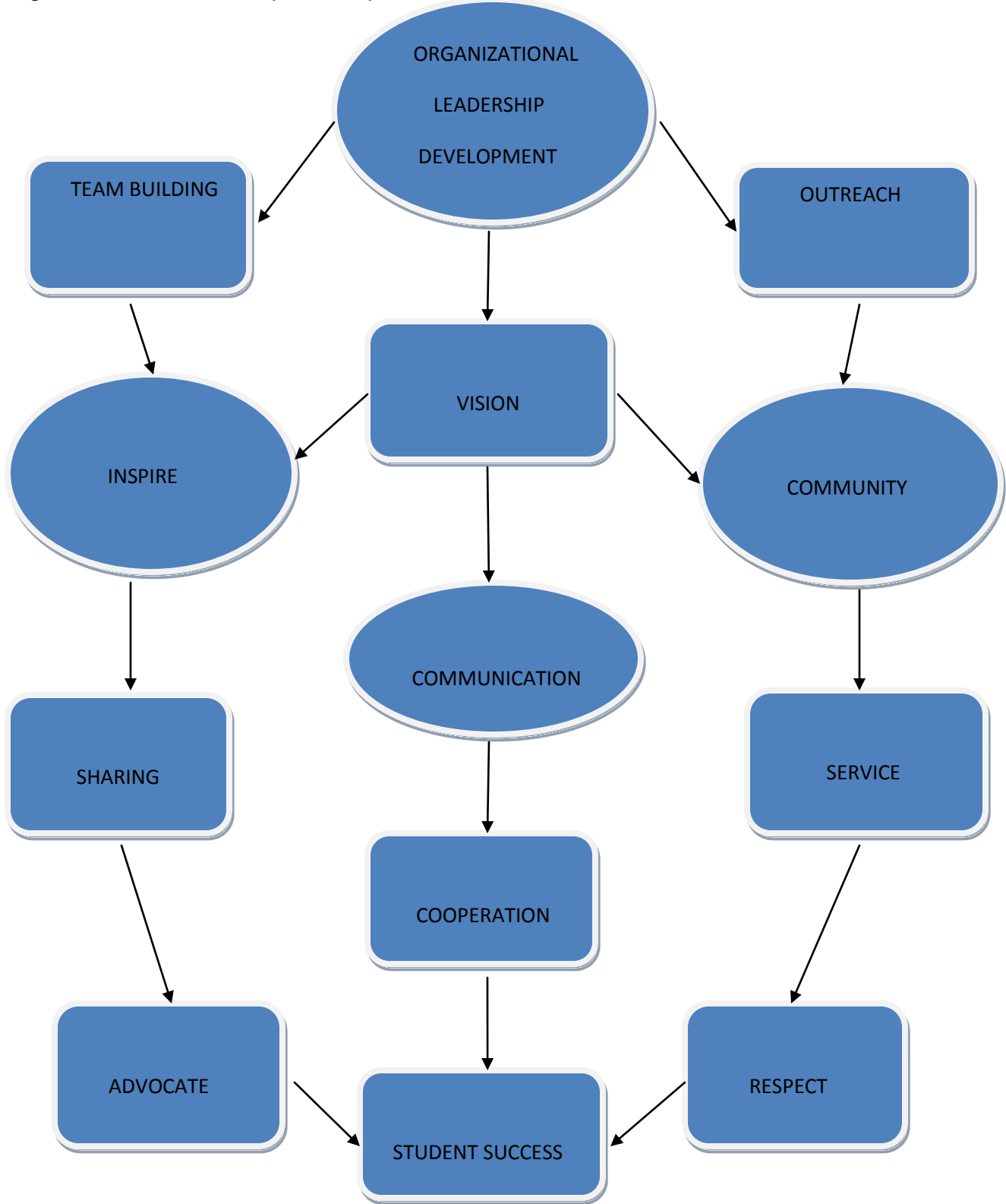
ISLLC Standard 3 “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.” (DoDEA Pacific, 2010)

Students are my number one priority in the Office of Financial Aid and organization from top to bottom is essential in administering federal, state and university funding designed to guarantee delivery of student aid. Safety of our students is also a major priority, not only on campus, but within our office. Safeguards are in place to counter any verbal or physical threats to our staff and visiting students. Any threat to safety is swiftly passed on to the Department of Public Safety without equivocation. I believe in order to sustain an effective learning environment it is necessary to be constantly vigilant and to pay close attention to any action that may threaten students and staff or disrupt the aid process. Organization of the Office of Financial Aid requires teamwork, communication,

training and implementation of policy as seen in the following concept map. My intention is to follow the concept of organization and strive to improve its effectiveness. The importance of following this concept is that without tight organization students could be left with substantial tuition and housing bills that would go unpaid, consequently requiring they drop out of school. In addition, working within the organization allows me to be a valuable member of the team. This is important to effective communication with staff that will embody an enjoyable working relationship, imbed the desire for individual staff fulfillment and generate a working environment that is not only conducive to creativity, but gives us all a common goal to improve on the policies and procedures already in place.

E-Lead website states that organizational leadership in schools includes “building collaborative processes” and “managing the environment” (e-Lead, n.d.) Of the varied knowledge base outlined at e-Lead, I believe these are the two most important components in effective organizational development toward the success of staff and student learning. Also, an integral part of an organization according to e-Lead is “School leaders attend to aspects of the school as an organization and a community, with consideration of internal processes and external relationships.” (e-Lead, n.d.) Any organization can be successful without inclusion of community involvement, but my belief is that for higher education we are a significant part of the community and that our internal processes have a direct correlation to maintaining, nurturing and enhancing our external relationships.

Organizational Leadership Development



ISLLC Standard 4 “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.” (DoDEA Pacific, 2010)

Standard 4 has been a component of financial aid since the office’s inception and I have committed to work diligently in furthering collaboration through the universities outreach. What outreach means to me is making myself accessible to students, their families and the community. Each year the Office of Admissions holds a program titled Inside MSU. This program invites potential students and their parents to attend seminars, tours and forums to address their questions and concerns. Financial aid officers participate by meet and greet during lunches for families. Our office also has an open door policy where any family member may stop in without appointment to speak with an advisor. Also, I accept invitations and participate with surrounding high schools to give presentations on financial aid. I have traveled throughout the state in conjunction with Office of Admissions in order to enlighten students and parents on the value of a college education. My future intention is to increase outreach activities keeping in mind my responsibility in adhering to the ISLLC standards.

Visibility and accessibility is the key to our successful outreach programs. The more information on financial aid we can present to the community, the more students we can encourage to pursue their dreams of a brighter future through education.

ISLLC Standard 5 “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.” (DoDEA Pacific, 2010)

Standard 5 is at the core of the Office of Financial Aid. Not only are we regulated by federal and state legislature, but we also adhere to university policy on integrity and ethics. I have been graced with small gifts from students and parents, such as, a thank you card, a small token from their study abroad travels, or vase of flowers, but any substantial gift would never be accepted. All students are important to me and treating them impartially and with respect imperative.

When determining a student's financial aid I utilize standard financial and family criteria without personal input. This creates a level playing field, so to speak, that views all students equally. It is only after the initial aid offer has been made that I will consider unusual circumstances within the family that may change the financial picture. These circumstances could include parent loss of employment, divorce or parent death. I will also consider circumstances where the student has become alienated from their parents and no longer has the means to obtain parental information in order to be considered for financial aid. Documentation of these unusual circumstances is extensive in order to maintain fairness to all students so that no one receives preferential treatment over others.

Fairness and equality is important not only to the student, but also to me as a Financial Aid Officer. In order to do my job, and find personal satisfaction in a job well done, I have made and will continue to make, Standard 5 a personal mission.

ISLLC Standard 6 "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context." (DoDEA Pacific, 2010)

My purpose in obtaining a Master's Degree in K-12 and Higher Education Leadership involves the ideals of Standard 6. Higher education financial aid is strictly regulated by federal and state law. In order to fully understand the complexities involved in administering financial aid and being a leader with the various financial aid organizations requires in depth understanding and compliance with those regulations. National, regional and state organization i.e. NASFAA (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, MASFAA (Mid-West Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators) and MSFAA (Michigan Student Financial Aid Administrators) membership involves complete knowledge of and lobbying of the political system that determines law regarding funding, delivering and administering financial aid. In addition, the needs of society, economically and culturally, dictate the different types of financial aid available for universities to administer. Without this understanding of the varied interests involved in financial aid will result in my failure to live up to all the standards of ISLLC. To be a leader within these organizations will require that I have extensive education necessary in order to change or implement change within the political system to guarantee continued educational funding along with the confidence that I can make a difference to students and their family's economic future.

In summary, all that I have learned over the past few months revolves around these six standards. I have realized that I have already been working with these standards in mind. I intend to keep these standards posted within my office to remind me that I do not just serve Michigan State University. My service is foremost toward

students and parents and that to honor my commitment to this service I must always be cognizant of why I chose to be a financial aid officer.

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