

## Board/Director Conflict Case Study #3



Thank you to KIPP for the above photo

### Facilitator's Notes:

The following case study seeks to address several school leader/instructional leaders competencies, including:

1. Identifying critical areas in which school board members should develop policies
2. Dealing effectively with board members
3. Dealing effectively with parents and family members of your students
4. Providing appropriate supervision of staff
5. Finding ways to take a controversial situation and make it a positive learning experience for most members of the school community.

Role: You are the director of a several year old urban charter school serving students grades 7-12. You have been a school administrator in one other school before being hired for this school. The school has been operating for 3 years.

The school: This is a urban charter public school started by several local ministers, families and others who are dissatisfied with the number of students who are not graduating from some local district high schools. The board includes some of the parents and community members who helped found the

school. They have very strong opinions about what they do and do not want the school to do. They want the school to teach morality as well as academic achievement. They want the school to help reduce the number of students who are having babies before marriage. They are very clear about the importance of having “strong moral principles” promoted at the school.

Introduction:

The chair of your charter public school board has just called you. She is very angry. Several parents have called, complaining about a book that 9<sup>th</sup> graders are reading. The parents feel that the novel is “very inappropriate, borderline pornography”. Among other things, the chair says that the book in question describes two teenagers having a sexual relationship. She says the relationship is depicted as “an ok thing, rather than something to be avoided.” The book allegedly also discusses teen prostitution in graphic ways. Some of the parents are asking for the teacher to be fired. Some of the parents say if they are not satisfied with the school’s response, they will go to the local news media. One of the parents apparently has written an email to a number of other parents, strongly criticizing the teacher, you (the director) and the school, as well as the school board for allowing this to happen. This email went to an undetermined number of parents/family members at your school.

The Board chair reports that the parents are saying, “Each student in a particular 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class has been assigned to read this book, which discusses, among other things, child prostitution.” The board chair has read a little of the book, which she says is “very offensive.” She wants to meet with you after school today.

The Board Chair is angry with you and the teacher. She is demanding action, including possibly firing the teacher. She thinks the books probably should be thrown out, or returned to the publisher. She wants you to come to the meeting this afternoon with a list of the steps you are ready to take.

Over the next few hours, you, as the charter director at this school discover that

- a. The teacher has in fact assigned the book to all students
- b. Your school has purchased 30 copies of the novel, which costs \$12 each (20% discount because the teacher purchased more than 20 copies of the book at the same time).
- c. The school does provide each teacher with a certain amount of money to purchase materials for classes. This is a source of pride for the school because it empowers the educators and was one of the things discussed in the original charter proposal.

- d. The book in question won a national award for its “frank, honest depiction of childhood prostitution” from a national group that is working on this issue
- e. In reading parts of the book, you conclude that it contains graphic, explicit descriptions of sexual activity.
- f. The five year old charter, which you began working at during its fourth year (previous director was fired),
  - a. Does not have a policy about parent notification of potentially controversial items
  - b. Does not appear to have considered the state law which requires parents to be notified of potentially controversial items and provided with an alternative assignment (It is not clear whether this law applies to charters)
  - c. Does not require teachers to provide parents, students or the administration with a syllabus ahead of time
  - d. Does not require teachers to provide lesson plans to the director
  - e. Does not have a policy about the administrator reviewing and approving proposed expenditures by teachers
  - f. Has had an informal policy whereby the board and director establish a budget, and the director provides certain amounts of that budget to each teacher for use in purchasing material. Some money is retained for purchases that will help several teachers or the entire school.
  - g. Does not have a policy delineating responsibilities of the board, director and staff in this and many other areas. The articles of incorporation contain a 2 sentence, very general description of the Board’s responsibilities.

Working with this case study:

1. Please make a brief list of the major issues that arise in this case study.
2. Please prepare a list of possible actions, some of which may involve:
  - a. Recommendations to the board for policy changes
  - b. Recommendations to the faculty regarding changes in procedure
  - c. Communication with the angry parents
  - d. Communication with the students in the class
  - e. Discipline action against the teacher
  - f. Consultation with the school’s attorney

3. Please prepare a timeline with your 5-8 highest priority recommendations for next steps. This should include:
  - a. How will you respond to the Board chair's recommendation that the teacher be fired?
  - b. How will you respond to the Board chair's recommendation that the students should be asked to return the books?
  - c. How would you respond to the suggestion that the books be returned to the publisher or thrown out?
  - d. What action(s) would you take to discuss this situation, and the larger implications, with the school's faculty?
  - e. What other recommendations would you make for immediate action?
  - f. What if any recommendations would you make for additional action over the next several months?
  
4. In an ideal world, some of the issues that arise in this case would have been worked out before the problem arose. These actions might not have prevented this controversy, but they might have made it easier to deal with. As director, what are three or four actions you think a school should take before a problem like this arises? These might involve
  - a. Development of school board policies to govern selection of materials
  - b. Notification of parents regarding use of materials that may involve controversy
  - c. Training for faculty in this area
  - d. Other