

**Standards-Based Self Assessment - Internship**

**Laura Weakland**

**Oakland University, Masters in Educational Leadership Program**

Author Note

This self-assessment was prepared for **EL 640, Internship for School Leaders**, summer of 2015 after year two of the internship.

### **Reflection on Leadership Growth**

I definitely feel like I have grown as a leader in this Master's in Educational Leadership experience. I have experienced growth from the readings I have done, the special guest presentations we have had in class, the conversations I have had with others in the cohort, and the writings and projects I have completed. In addition, the internship has afforded me continued support with leadership opportunities at my school, Dolsen Elementary ("Dolsen"), and South Lyon Community Schools District (the "District") under the mentorship of Megan Goodemoot, principal at Dolsen. In addition, I also have been recommended for additional leadership roles and am excited about possible doors being opened because of the leadership roles I have already taken and the experiences I gained through the internship. I look forward to the upcoming years!

The internship for Oakland University's M.Ed. in Educational Leadership lasts two years with a minimum of 220 hours logged. Leading learning is a passion of mine so I often seek out opportunities to lead others, whether it's students in my classroom, teachers in my building, parents in the community, or educators beyond the district I work in. Accordingly, I have logged many varied experiences and hours in leadership during this 2-year internship. In year two, I obtained **240** hours in leadership roles and in year one I obtained **241.30** hours for a **combined 481.3** hours. Highlights of my second year and the standards they address are as follows:

#### **Standard 1: Articulation, Implementation, and Stewardship of a Vision of Learning**

My experiences in this standard are primarily focused in my Cultures of Thinking (CoT) leadership team role and my involvement on the Shared Involvement Process (SIP) committee. This year I had the privilege of serving for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year on the CoT Leadership Team, as well as, SIP committee.

Three years ago, I was also selected to be part of Dolsen's CoT Leadership Team. This initiative is also part of the District's vision and school improvement plan. We began the year by

meeting with other district leadership teams to discuss our journey and to plan our goals for the year. Our goals for year three were to continue to build a culture of thinking and the 8 cultural forces needed to implement and sustain a culture of thinking. This year we specifically focused on language and opportunities with a content-specific focus (reading and math). I also wrote an article for our local paper communicating our vision: “Developing Dispositions for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning at Dolsen.” This article and message of our shared vision was also published in our school newsletter, *The Dolsen Discovery* and communicated to parents at a SIP and PTO meeting.

Our building-level SIP committee is made of administrators, parents, teachers, and administrative staff. This ensures all stakeholders are represented. This committee embarks on discussion of building level issues and utilizes a collaborative decision-making process. As part of this team, I got to participate in providing feedback to the District and Dolsen on the School Improvement Plan. This plan articulates the vision of the District. This opportunity gave me the opportunity to understand how a district and a school collaboratively develop, articulate, and implement a shared vision of learning.

## **Standard 2: Sustaining a school culture and instructional program**

Over the course of the past two years of my internship, I spent almost half of my internship hours on this standard. This is an area that I am very passionate about and is an area that my mentor sees as a strength as mine, as she has afforded me many opportunities to grow and develop in this area. Over the course of year two of my internship, my hours in this standard primarily fell into the following sub-areas:

- New teacher professional learning (building level and district level):
  - A day of learning about CoT – “*Making Thinking Visible*”
  - District-wide new teacher workshop – “*Utilizing the Math Workshop Model in the Elementary Classroom*”
  - District-wide new teacher workshop on engagement – “*Engaging the Whole-Brain Learner: Developing Classroom Culture to Support Academic Achievement*”

- Staff professional learning (building level and district level)
  - Professional learning for curriculum day – *“The Whole-Brained Learner: Developing Culture and Skills for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning”*
  - Professional learning for curriculum day on the Standards of Mathematical Practice – *“Baking the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Mathematician”*
  - Professional learning math series for staff meetings – *“Pushing Student Thinking in Mathematics: Providing Students Rich Opportunities and Supporting Math Discourse”*
  - District-wide professional learning for 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers on the new curriculum and unpacking the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (CCSS-M).
  - District-wide M-Step professional learning – *“Providing Online Math Opportunities for Elementary Students using FrontRow”*
- Math subject-area-committee (SAC) – developed CCSS-M aligned district math assessments (mid-year and year-end)
- Mentor for grade level colleagues

In conjunction with the District’s vision of establishing a culture of thinking at each building, I was fortunate enough to serve as the lead staff member for the CoT leadership team. Our task was to continue to lead the staff in professional learning on how to develop a culture of thinking. In addition, grades 2-4 were transitioning to CCSS-M alignment. Accordingly, we centered a good deal of our professional learning around providing rich opportunities to push student thinking in mathematics, as well as supporting the discourse. For the second year in a row, I was in charge of planning an entire year of professional learning for teachers. Because of my experiences in this area, I was also asked on several occasions to lead professional learning at the district level. I learned a lot about what it takes to plan an entire year of professional learning and how important it is to create powerful professional learning experiences for staff.

Also this year, I worked on the Math SAC for the District. This year we had the task of creating CCSS-M aligned district math assessment for fourth grade. I learned a great deal about assessment creation from alignment to standards to creating challenging questions to creating “kid-friendly” assessments that assessed the math learning and not reading comprehension, etc. We spent many hours creating these assessments.

Lastly, I mentored both of my grade level colleagues this year. This gave me great insight on what it takes to provide feedback to staff on instructional delivery and best practices for teaching and to serve as a coach and inspiration to others.

Being a leader that promotes the success of every student and staff member by sustaining a school culture and instructional program that is conducive to student learning is one of the most important tasks of the building level administrator.

### **Standard 3: Management of organization, operations, and resources**

This year I got the opportunity to create the specials schedule for our building with a colleague as a way of developing my understanding of how to manage an organization, its operations and its resources. I didn't realize how complex the task is with having to take into consideration traveling specials teachers, varying lunch schedules, combination classes, etc. We also worked very hard to give grade level teachers some mutual planning time. Creating the schedule felt like working a giant Sudoku puzzle!

Also this year, I got the opportunity to shadow my principal on all of our building drills: lockdown, fire, and tornado. I learned that a lot more goes "into" a drill beyond what the classroom teacher observes. Each drill is unique and requires many steps, from contacting local police/fire personnel, to arming and disarming alarms, to state and district required logging of drills and the associated paperwork, and much more. I took detailed step-by-step notes for each drill as a way to prepare to lead them independently one day.

Lastly, I attended and observed kindergarten registration. Because I teach upper elementary, I often look for opportunities to observe and participate in lower elementary events as a means of building understanding of how to manage the lower elementary aspects of leading learning.

**Standard 4: Collaborating with family and community and responding to diversity**

This year I proposed and led the staff in preparing/presenting a “student-led” portion of Curriculum Night as a way to communicate and collaborate with families on our vision of student learning and thinking. Students prepared presentations for parents on the learning and thinking that is going happening in their classrooms. Accordingly, this event needed to be planned and communicated to staff, students, and family. I also attended the lower elementary night and helped facilitate the evening, as well as organized the preparation of personalized welcome letters for each family to be passed out by greeters from the Helping Hands Club.

Also, as a means of collaborating with family and community, I organized a community event, “Run Wild” at the Detroit Zoo. I created flyers for families and emailed staff to spread the word about this “Taking Care of Ourselves” event at the zoo. Staff, students, and families came out to walk/run in the event.

Lastly as a means of responding to diversity, I organized a “Helping Hands” snack bag program and organized a school-wide assembly on the importance of “Taking Care of Others/Ourselves.” The bags of snacks are distributed to teachers to ensure every child has a snack to eat every day. This program is part of our larger “Taking Care of Others/Ourselves” initiatives that I started several years ago. Along with these snack bags, I organized a school assembly for K-5 students on what it means to be a “leader” and help ourselves and others sponsored by the Leader Dog for the Blind organization. My principal subbed in my classroom so I could run the entire assembly for both upper and lower grades. I was able to announce the special guests, as well as take questions. I then designed a flyer/fundraiser that my Helping Hands Club sponsored to raise money for the Leader Dog organization.

These opportunities gave me valuable experience in collaborating with the community to promote the success of every student and to encourage the respect and appreciation of diversity.

**Standard 5: Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner**

As mentioned under Standard 4, I created and led a “Taking Care of Others” initiative which included several components. The first component helps students develop empathy, compassion, and acceptance for others through literature. Teachers are using the books in their classroom to foster discussion on these crucial traits. This year I was able to purchase an additional \$750 worth of picture books for the Dolsen Taking Care of Others/Ourselves initiative. This money was awarded the previous year for 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the 2014 Oakland Schools Excellence in Education Awards. Time was spent finding books that have strong moral theme and then purchasing the books, reading the books, and labeling the books for the collection. Books were then presented to staff on Curriculum Day.

The Helping Hands Club (which I also created and run) led several service projects this year as a way of “taking care of others.” One of the service projects we ran was Alex’s Lemonade Stand. Alex’s Lemonade Stand is an organization that raises money to support research in pediatric cancer. Our Helping Hands Club led the school to raise over \$2,500. As part of this service project, we hosted an actual lemonade stand at lunch! We also designed and sold “Dolsen Taking Care of Others from the Heart” bookmarks that we sold during the month of February to raise money for a teacher in the district whose son is battling cancer.

In addition to these initiatives, I served as a “Girls on the Run” coach which is a program that leads girls to better understand who they are and what’s important to them, how to make and create healthy choices and relationships, and how to positively connect with and shape the world. This aspect of education might be deemed the “hidden curriculum” as there aren’t usually lessons built into the curriculum on these ideas, but I feel as a school leader it’s very important to lead and model these traits and skills.

I think it is important for building leaders to model and teach students how to act and live with integrity, fairness, and ethics.

**Standard 6: Understanding, responding to and influencing the larger political, social, economics, legal, and cultural context.**

Teachers and schools cannot teach and learn in isolation. It is important for teachers to branch out to the larger educational community. Even though my log does not reflect any of these hours, I have a very active professional learning network that I have built through Twitter. This allows me to follow what's current in the politics of education. It also allows me to connect with other educators in Michigan, as well as, around the world. I also stay connected to the Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics by participating in an online book club every year. In addition, I watched our District board meetings virtually (since they are on Monday nights and conflict with class). Lastly, this year I was asked to serve on the Bond Issuance Committee. This committee was made up of teachers, parents, administrators, and board members. As a committee, we worked on the presentation that was made to the Board of Education. In addition, we worked on how the bond issuance would be communicated to stakeholders.

**Standard 7: Practice Ready - Summary and Career Goals**

As I reflect on the experiences of the past 2 years, I truly am amazed at my own leadership growth. I feel the readings I've done, the classes I've taken, the conversations I've had, and the experiences I've embarked on have all prepared me for a role in leadership. I am looking forward to seeing where this journey takes me. I imagine I will interview for principal jobs, as well as, any instructional coaching jobs I might find. My heart and soul and passion is in "leading learning" for kids and for adults. I hope to transition to a leadership role that utilizes my skills and passion.