**Module 5, Assignment 1:**

**Applying the Ethical Decision Making Model**

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**The Opening Scenario and Rationale**

In this scenario, “Mr. Nelson”, a director of Curriculum and Instruction in a district with six elementary schools is facing a conundrum. Sixty percent of students from kindergarten to grade four were showing proficiency in math, which affected secondary math performance. The district has been placed on the “District in Need of Assistance” (DINA) list from the U.S. Department of Education under the “No Child Left Behind” Act (NCLB). This has district officials and teachers “extremely concerned”, so the school board charged Mr. Nelson “to develop a plan for the improvement of student achievement in mathematics.” Nelson seeks and secures funding from the school board for a new curriculum.

**Recognize the Ethical Issue**

1. ***Could this decision or situation be damaging to someone or to some group? Does this decision involve a choice between a good and bad alternative, or perhaps between two "goods" or between two "bads"?***

As hard as Mr. Nelson hoped for, and worked for, consensus in the curriculum adoption, two camps formed; the Grade 3-4 camp and Grade K-2 camp, each agreeing on their own curriculum. The school board adopted the favorite of grade 3-4. This would come across as a “win-lose” (i.e. “good-bad”) situation between the two teams. It is imperative that Nelson has a barometer that can sense individual and collective feelings, showing gratitude for everyone’s time, and promising that he’ll do whatever he can to find the resources needed to support everyone, hopefully leading make people feel as if that they can turn this into a win-win for the district.

1. ***Is this issue about more than what is legal or what is most efficient? If so, how?***

Mr. Nelson has the weight of elementary students’ achievement and the reputation of district officials and the teachers in his hands. He also has to work with parents as well, who, like many teachers, have shown contentment with the math curriculum. At first, he seems to want efficiency, as he had not considered forming a committee, but he ends up doing what is legal, or right, by involving representatives from as many stakeholder groups as he could consider.

**Get the Facts**

1. ***What are the relevant facts of the case? What facts are not known? Can I learn more about the situation? Do I know enough to make a decision?***

The most relevant fact is that K-4 math achievement is at 60%. More students need to show proficiency. What is not known is are there common areas withi n math where roficiency? Is the score trending down or is it consistently around 60%? Mr. Nelson had enough data to justify the school board funding a request for a new math curriculum ado

1. ***What individuals and groups have an important stake in the outcome? Are some concerns more important? Why?***

The students and the staff working with them have the biggest stake. The students are the most important stakeholders, as the work of a school system centers around them. With the district being in DINA status from NCLB, there is an added sense of urgency for action as there are also consequences from NCLB for staff who teach them.

1. ***What are the options for acting? Have all the relevant persons and groups been consulted? Has he identified creative options?***

At first, Nelson seemed as if a new curriculum. The state Department of Education mandated improvement but did not specify how to do it. He did seem to take the lead himself in deciding that a new elementary math curriculum was needed. However, I credit him for seeking other voices, teachers, administrators, and especially parents and a math team from a nearby university. That was a creative move. He also comes to his job with much math experience as a member of the National Council of Teachers of Math (NCTM), knowing curriculum vendors he could invite to meetings as well…His asking neighboring districts to share their experiences was a stroke of genius.

**Evaluate Alternative Actions**

1. ***Evaluate the options by asking the following questions:***

* ***Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm? (The Utilitarian Approach)***
* ***Which option best respects the rights of all who have a stake? (The Rights Approach)***
* ***Which option treats people equally or proportionately? (The Justice Approach)***
* ***Which option best serves the community as a whole, not just some members? (The Common Good Approach)***
* ***Which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be? (The Virtue Approach)***

Whether or not it was intentional, I believe Mr. Nelson was being *virtuous*, thinking of what he could do to help the most people, namely the students and staff… It would be in the best interest of him to do so, plus wanting to help the most people as many people as possible from the decisions you make is *utilitarian*, it also serves *the common good.*

***7. Considering all these approaches, which option best addresses the situation?***

***8.******If I told someone I respect -- or told a television audience -- which option I have chosen, what would they say?***

As a leader, Mr. Nelson needs to keep all five approaches above in mind as he makes individual and collective decisions. In my opinion, as the curriculum director of a school district, Nelson needs to always prioritize The Common Good Approach over the others, as he is a representative of his colleagues and a servant to the community who pays his salary.

If someone from the press – or anyone, for that matter approaches Nelson about the decision that was made, he needs be honest and ride the to say that,

*“A wide spectrum of people was involved with the decision-making process that led to the recommendation I made to the school board. I hoped we could reach a consensus, but even though we didn’t reach one for the curriculum we recommended, we are in clear consensus that our district is committed to not only use the new curriculum, but draw from that vast talent and wealth of resources we have within our district to continue to do what’s right and best for our students. They deserve no less.”*

**Act and Reflect on the Outcome**

1. ***How can his decision be implemented with the greatest care and attention to the concerns of all stakeholders?***
2. ***How did his decision turn out and what have I learned from this specific situation?***

Once Nelson decided to open up the search process, I think he excelled at getting a nice wide sample of stakeholders and participants. It is key to have more voices – i.e., stakeholders – involved in ethical decision-making processes that involve more people. However a drawbacks] of a wide sample and frequent (bi-weekly) meetings are (1) the cost of paying people for their time (Was that part of the initial budget request?), and (2) the more people that are involved in the process, the more difficult it becomes to make consensus. It is sad that consensus on one curriculum could not be reached, but it came as no surprise. Realizing that having more stakeholders from differing backgrounds and work experiences make reaching consensus more is one of the key learnings I have taken from this assignment.

Even though Nelson had to deal with an outcome that may have left many primary teachers left out, it is will be up to Mr. Nelson to facilitate a process with the superintendent and other district leaders that communicates appreciation for ALL of the stakeholders involved in the process, namely those who provided differing thoughts, experiences, and opinions.

**Final Reflections: What would I have done?**

I really liked, and would have also used, Nelson’s ethical implementation of the Common Good Approach which led his thinking throughout most of this decision-making process. The people or representatives he invited to be on the team, and the people and resources he sought out to help the team with the daunting challenge facing them that year shows his competence and respect for the community, or communities, for whom he works. He could have created a curriculum clique of like-minded yes people to make a speedy decision that could have been played as being efficient. For example he knew, and I could tell, that the Grade 3-4 camp would have a different mindset than the K-2 camp. He also knew that select members of the Grade 3-4 camp has a history of getting what they wanted – which is, in a roundabout way, what happened. But by involving more people, with the (pipe) dream of consensually agreeing to a curriculum, members of both camps had their own “A-ha!” moments and moved forward in considering new approaches to math instruction.

The only think I would have done differently, which I did not see addressed in the scenario, would be to:

1. double down on thanking everyone for their time, sharing how we all learned and grew individually and collectively with our notions on best practices in math instruction, and
2. make a commitment to the K-2 camp that I would do what I could to make this new curriculum work as best as possible for them and their students, reassuring everyone that we’ll keep on using our learning communities, resources, and data gathering to make the best decisions for all of our students.

**REFERENCE**

Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. (2015, August 1). *A Framework for Ethical Decision Making.* Santa Clara University, Markkula Center. https://scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/a-framework-for-ethical-decision-making