

August 3, 2020

Field Experience D: Protecting the Welfare and Safety of Students and Staff

Interview

For this assignment, I interviewed Dr. Jacqueline Norton, assistant principal at Lake Carolina Elementary in Columbia, South Carolina. She is a soror of mine and someone I consider as a mentor in education. She is the lead over safety at her school, hence her being a good candidate for this field experience. The responses were given considering our current situation with COVID-19 and how it will be addressed in schools. Our interview was conducted via video chat to social distance.

**Kiara Wilson =KW and Dr. Norton = Dr. N*

KW: What do you consider are the most important tasks related to keeping students and staff safe on the school campus?

Dr. N: The most important tasks will be ensuring social distancing and keeping our students and staff as safe as possible with the proper protocols. Learning is always a priority, however, if students and teachers are sick and at home, we can't teach them nor can they learn. The biggest thing will be teaching students their new normal for right now.

KW: Do you feel your school campus is safe for students and staff? What is working? What would you like to add to your campus to ensure their well-being?

Dr. N: Our school campus has not been prepped for students/staff to return as of yet due to the phases of Richland 2. I have no doubt that once students can return in phase 2, buildings will be as safe as possible for all who enter our doors.

KW: How do you train teachers and staff for emergencies? What is required by law? Do you do anything beyond what is legally required?

Dr. N: Once again, none of these things have been finalized due to the R2 phases. The one thing that we do know is that by law, we are responsible for teaching our students for 180 days, whether that be brick and mortar or virtually, we plan to do the best that we can for the benefit of our students. We will have to think long and hard about how teachers will be trained in emergencies and still socially distance themselves and students.

-However, teachers are now trained for natural disaster, fire, intruder drills, I would venture to say that they will also be trained to be aware of possible suspicions of COVID 19 symptoms and a

August 3, 2020

protocol will be put into place for how to handle it. If we need to go beyond, we will because that is just what we do as a district and as a school. Really, teachers in general.

KW: Are you always able to follow your planned emergency drill schedule? If not, how do you document that?

Dr. N: The only thing that stops us from utilizing our planned schedule is if there is a weather constraint. For example, we have a fire drill planned at 1:00 and it starts raining. We immediately plan for another date after checking the weather. If the next day is good and all admin is on campus, we go for it. We also have to take into consideration the SPED classes and if any other students have 504 or IEP accommodations or even parent requests that they are notified in advance due to anxiety or other issues.

KW: How do you decide what safety or emergency information you will communicate to families? The community?

Dr. N: There are really no decisions to be made, if there is something happening that gives us pause, we contact our communications director and the information is disseminated from the principal or district. Transparency is key!

KW: When communicating safety or emergency information to families and/or the community, what methods do you use?

Dr. N: Same as listed above, we contact district office personnel for information on how to proceed school based or if information is disseminated from the district. Always best to contact them first to get guidance. You never want to be in a situation where it seems like the school was trying to hide info or be deceptive.

Reflection-PSEL Standards 5 & 8 /Future Practice

This field experience most closely relates to PSEL 5a (*Build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets that the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student.*) and PSEL 8c (*Engage in regular and open two-way communication with families and the community about the school, students, needs, problems, and accomplishments*).

Our students' physical needs are being infringed upon due to the lack of air conditioning, and it is our job to put them in a better environment where that need is met. Also, throughout this process it is important to maintain communication with our school families about what is going on and how we are caring for their children.

August 3, 2020

After this learning experience, I now further understand the importance of communication and adhering to district guidelines that have already been set in place. This ensures that I am not simply making up decisions, but following protocols to keep my students and staff safe, in terms of both physical and legal sense. In my experiences with my mentor, I have observed for myself how often administration is in contact with the district office, almost on a daily basis. It is okay to consult with them and ask questions, and not feel as if because I am “in charge” that I have to always act as such.

National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015. Reston, VA: Author