Case Analysis – Estes Park School Division

You are the newly hired Director of Estes Park Public Schools. Estes Park is a small rural K12 district. There are 1800 students in the school division. The population is largely Caucasian (60%). The remaining 40% is broken down as follows: 20% African-American, 15% Hispanic (although this population fluxes between 10% and 18% based on migrant workers) and approximately 5% Other (Asian, American India, etc.). The school division has a free and reduced lunch population of 48%. The special education population is 25% and is largely comprised of math and/or reading learning disability (LD) labels. LD comprises 20% of identified exceptional children; the remaining 5% are children with severe impairments and other health impairments (OHI). Eight percent of the district population is identified gifted.

The district of Estes Park is comprised of four (4) schools:

**High Meadow Elementary** is a PK-2 school with 100 students. The school principal is in her third year at this school. She is requiring the use of data (running records and other pre- and early reading assessments) to guide teaching and learning. She has introduced a pre-K reading program that is popular but few students are served in the half-day program. First and second grades are involved in looping and many teachers share groups of students. Most students are reading at the end of first grade and have appropriate phonemic awareness, site word recognition, and content awareness. All students that are not in this group are African-American, Hispanic, special needs, and low socio-economic status. This group is 15% of the first grade and by the end of second grade the percentage is the same.

HME is an old building and lacks the technology that other schools have. It is historic to the community and loved by all. Playgrounds here are old and not age appropriate. The school is operating at about 70% capacity; there is a wing consisting of 8 classrooms that is not utilized. Staff in this school is comprised of all veteran teachers, none with less than 15 years of experience and most with their full career in this school. Few support the direction that the new principal is moving but most of their lack of support is expressed in the community. A common belief is that they will outlast the principal and believe that test based student achievement interferes with child development; after all, there are no state mandated grade level tests in this school.

**Hillside Elementary** is comprised of grades 3 through 6 and houses 600 students. The school principal is a 30 year veteran in the school division with all his experience in this school. He is a very congenial leader, who was able to maintain his position as assistant football coach at the high school for many of his years of service. He firmly believes that all students and staff can be successful, “if they just pull on their boots and make a commitment to winning.” Hillside is the district’s newest school building, constructed 12 years ago. It is operating very close to capacity, but has a great deal of usable technologies. Each classroom has a white board, teacher computer, 3 student computers, LCD projector, and wireless access.
Students in grades three and four have the same teacher for science and mathematics and for English and social studies. In grades five and six, all classes are grouped by content and homogenously by test data and teacher recommendation. Physical education and art are grouped across grades as there are only two physical education teachers and one art and one music teacher. Art and music are considered enrichment classes and students in the gifted program and others that are considered strong candidates to pass state assessments qualify to take these courses. Students that do not qualify receive additional content area remediation. Students in this category are predominately minority, special education and low socio-economic status students.

Teachers at the school are largely bimodal in their experience distribution. They are either under five years of total experience or over 10 years of total experience. Most of the more experienced teachers have all their experience at Hillside. The others are mostly new to the system. Morale at the school is low. There is apparent tension between both groups of teachers and between teachers in the upper grades and lower grades.

School attendance fluctuates, but hovers around, 94%. The school, due to low scores in subgroups, has not been fully accredited in two years. If the situation does not improve within two years, teachers and administrators may be replaced by a mandated state department improvement team. In grades three and five, science scores are at 71% passing but below the state mean. English scores are at 65%; math 69%, and social studies is at 66%. These scores are also below the state mean. Sub group data indicates that African-American males, special education students, and Hispanic male students score below white students by 15% in all categories.

Parents are supportive of the school but concerns over accreditation, a tense professional climate, and a perception of poor instruction are mounting.

**Foggy Branch Middle School** is over 80 years old and was the old high school. It is a two story building and is in the shape of an “L” on both floors. The school principal was placed there by the prior Director. Before moving to this principalship, he was the supervisor of career and technical education. That position was consolidated with the school principal position. The current principal is clearly unhappy due to the move and is more than willing to express his issues.

FBMS has about 300 students and is divided in grades seven and eight. All the students fit in the building and there are 10 classrooms not being utilized. The school has a well-equipped library, two computer labs with 30 stations and two student computers and a teacher’s computer in each classroom. The halls need painting and the lockers need repairing. The auditorium is grand in the tradition of an old auditorium, it needs new stage curtains but the sound system is good. The auditorium seats 500. The grounds are spacious and include a stadium in need of repair and a six lane asphalt track. The beautiful gardens that once surrounded the school are no longer tended by the local Garden Club and have become grown over.

FBMS operates like a junior high more than a middle school. Classes are organized by content, grade level, and students are grouped by ability. Estes Park is on a traditional seven period day, with 48 minute periods and 4 minute transitions. Most special education students are served in pull-out programs. Course offerings are standard with the exception of Algebra I being offered to a very select (one class) group of
students in the eighth grade. Eighth grade students take exploratory elective offerings – art, trades, Spanish culture, French culture, music – one per grading period. A select few students receive music as a full year elective, but must be recommended and pass an entrance audition. Gifted students receive pull out instruction one time each week for 30 minutes. There are currently no before school programs, after school programs, or sports/intramural programs, and there has not been a dance in over three years.

State assessment scores indicate students in science and social studies are improving but still are short of state benchmarks. Mathematics and English are well below expectations. As with other schools, minority student achievement is low.

School discipline is not a major issue. Annually, Estes Park has been a school with low numbers of fights and there has been only two knives confiscated in the past year. The biggest issues are typical middle school issues of shoving, pushing, running in the halls, spreading rumors and talking trash.

Teacher morale at the building is low. Teachers are however united in a genuine caring for the school. 60% of the school staff has between 10 and 25 years of service, while the remaining 40% have less than 10 years of service. Many staff members feel that the system has forgotten them as they receive less instructional money per pupil than any other school in the system. The sting of ineffective administrators has left staff feeling un-empowered, void of resources, and without direction.

**Estes Park High School** (EPHS) is a grade 9 through 12 school of approximately 800 students. The principal is in her fifth year at the school. She was new to the district upon her hire. She has her doctoral degree and is viewed as a strong instructional leader; however, most of her efforts were blocked by the prior Director and Supervisor of Career and Technical Programs, who had strong informal power at EPHS. EHS has similar demographic to the other schools and community. Its test data is also similar to the other schools with scores overall being average with lower performance in all subgroups. Teachers at the high school have a similar distribution as the middle school. Climate in the school is better than other schools. Departments seem to share within their content area and the school is strongly focused on athletics. EPHS is a frequent contender for top state honors. Students may only participate in athletics with strong grade point averages, strong attendance, and no discipline problems. Staff and community support for athletics has almost completely overshadowed other extracurricular activities such as drama, debate, and symphonic band/choir.

Much like the middle school, discipline is not a major issue and problems are similar to most high schools in this rural area of the state. Common issues are disrespect, skipping school, etc. and there is an occasional fight and on occasion issues with drugs or alcohol, though those are limited.

Most students take Algebra I in the ninth grade. They also begin elective offerings in the ninth grade. Spanish and French are language offerings, American sign-language maybe taken online. With the exception of elective courses, all courses have regular and honors levels. Advanced Placement (AP) offerings are available to a select group in the 11th grade and open to all students with strong grades in prior honors classes in the senior year. Honors classes and AP courses are without diversity and students identified gifted at the high school level appear to be only students of teachers.
The school offers building trades, auto body, and machine shop. The career and technical trades are overwhelmingly occupied by minority male students. Completer rates in these programs are low.

Attendance at the school is low, averaging about 90%. The drop-out rate is advertised as 5%. However, this rate is not accurate because a state program allows high schools to move students into alternative settings, provide low level job skills and consider the student a completer even though they do not receive a diploma. Minority females are among the highest drop-out group.

The school operates on a traditional seven period day with approximately 50 minutes per class.

Estes Park is a rural community nestled among the mountains. It is located within a 30 – 40 minute drive to a suburban center with a large and reputable teaching hospital. West State University (WSU), a 10,000 student school with a strong school of education is located near the hospital center. Business in this area centers on an auto race track and several manufacturing companies. The community of Estes Park is bimodal in the distribution of wealth. There are “haves” and “have-nots” with very little between. Parents are supportive of the school but not involved. There are no local partnerships although there are a few local businesses that could be school/district partners. In the Estes Park area there is a printing business, a few restaurants, and a modular learning lab company. Further outside the Estes Park area is a large stone/cement/asphalt company and a large paper manufacturer has tree several farms. Most parents however, work in jobs located in the suburbs. Diversity in the community is represented much like it is in the schools. Most affluent parents are Caucasian. Minority groups are mostly hourly employees.

The school board is very committed to change and improvement. In a joint meeting with the school board and local county board, it was made clear that both boards were supportive of you and your charge to improve the schools. Everyone echoed the expectation that better schools would positively impact the community, businesses, and families.

School Leadership Candidates Assignment:

1. Develop a strategic plan for improving the Estes Park School Division. Provide your definition of strategic planning; outline at least 3 focus areas for district improvements and areas that you believe are strengths that should be maintained. Your plan should include teaching and learning, professional development, community development, business partnership development, district financial and facilities improvement.

2. Using research from areas such as management, leadership, learning theory, psychology, sociology, political science, and other areas of the ETSU leadership program. Develop and describe the implementation process for your plan to implement the strategic plan developed in item number 1.

3. Utilizing research to support your actions, detail how you will evaluate the development and implementation of items 1 and 2.
Administrative Candidates Assignment:

1. Develop a strategic plan for improving one specific school in the Estes Park School Division. Provide your definition of strategic planning; outline at least 3 focus areas for district improvements and areas that you believe are strengths that should be maintained. Your plan should include teaching and learning, professional development, community development, business partnership development, district financial and facilities improvement.

2. Using research from areas such as management, leadership, learning theory, psychology, sociology, political science, and other areas of the ETSU leadership program. Develop and describe the implementation process for your plan to implement the strategic plan developed in item number 1.

3. Utilizing research to support your actions, detail how you will evaluate the development and implementation of items 1 and 2.