

# Making the Grade with Your Administrators

by Meredith Watassek, former President, TDEA

Working well within your community and with your administrators can make or break any school year. After spending some time visiting with administrators from districts across the state of Texas, one thing has become very clear ~ keeping your administrator informed will create an amazing working relationship!

That all seems well and good... but what happens when it means that you must tell an administrator that a decision you made may not have been the best one? Believe it or not, an administrator is much more likely to support you if you have taken responsibility for that decision than if you try to “pass the buck.” Most administrators realize that mistakes will be made and guess what ~ they have probably even made a few during their tenure!

## Common Mistakes

- ❖ Not knowing why you have made a decision
- ❖ Forgetting to value a parent/student who has a complaint
- ❖ Not knowing how to “pick your battles”

## Correcting the Mistake

It is easy to do something over and over that works for you but have you stopped to evaluate (or re-evaluate) whether there might be a better, more efficient way of accomplishing the same task? Tradition sometimes stands in the way of change and from time to time, change is necessary. If you are completely confident that your decision should stand as is, then understand why you feel that way.

A great example ~ every student must wear the same shorts, t-shirt, hair bow, and make-up...but why? Well, if the answer is that it is part of the costume, then by all means, don't change it. But if you are walking around a theme park or a mall, is it necessary to have all students in matching belts and shoes?

To the student and to the parents, this might appear to be another way to get them to spend money or

to take away their individualism. To us as directors ~ well, it is easier to require the same of all than to look at 50 individuals. The bottom line, unless it is a safety issue, the shoes, belt, and hair probably don't really matter. Try allowing them to “do it their way” (as long as they all wear the same t-shirt for identity purposes). The students will think you have given them FREEDOM. The parents will see their students happy and well, you probably won't even see them except on the bus!

*Golden Rule #1 – always know WHY you have made a decision*

*Golden Rule #2 – even if a parent / student is complaining, never make them feel as though their opinion is not valued.*

I frequently use the line ~ “It is o.k. to disagree, and from time to time we will.” I generally spend a great deal of time at the beginning of the year letting parents know that we may not always agree on what the best way is to handle a situation but that as the director, I am having to handle the situation the best way possible for the ENTIRE team.

Key phrases that can quickly dissolve a complaint (or at least bring the tension down):

- ◆ I value your opinion
- ◆ I understand that you are upset
- ◆ I will consider your recommendation
- ◆ That is a valid point

All of these comments followed by a request to postpone decision making until the following day will usually result in a much better outcome. Parents generally want to be heard and then are happy. If you take the emotion out of deciding how to handle a situation, you will most likely make a decision that pleases many more people.



---

Several years ago, a friend once said to me, "I let the parents win 1 battle - but then I get to win the next 7!" This one comment has helped me TREMENDOUSLY over the past few years. Let's face it, we don't like to lose ~ not at contest and most certainly not when we are being criticized. But we all know that is not reality. If parents, students, and administrators see you making an effort to meet them in the middle, they are much more likely to be on your side. There are just some things not worth losing sleep over and those are the battles you should consider letting the parents / students "win". When all is said and done, everyone will be a winner because you will spend much less time worrying over a disagreement.

So how does all this play a part in keeping your administrators happy? If these three "problems" are addressed, most of them won't even reach the administrators' desk. So what do you do when the battle lines are drawn and no one is willing to give in? First things first ~ make sure you are the one who has the first opportunity to inform the administrator. When a complaint comes in and it can't be resolved, immediately contact your supervisor. Try to remain unemotional and state only facts when sharing the story. Be willing to admit it if the decision you have made is going to be questioned by others; be willing to admit it if something isn't working; and most importantly, be willing to change if need be.

*"Know how to listen, and you will profit  
even from those who talk badly."*

*~Plutarch*

The challenges of the school systems are changing daily and with that, we too must change. There will always be room for improvement so take it all in stride. Learn from each opportunity and make yourself the best educator you can be!

