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<b>Strength Competencies</b>	Leadership Communication Instructional Leadership Monitoring Student Learning
<b>Growth Competencies</b>	Policy & Law Human Resource Management Equity & Culturally Responsive Leadership Organizational Management

As I reflect on this competency, this is an area where I have needed to do a lot of introspective digging to learn more about who I am and the values that drive my leadership style. At the time I started the program, I did not have a well defined "why" that led me to leadership. I knew I had a strong set of interpersonal skills and enjoyed taking on leadership roles, but I had not considered why I was drawn to the work.

Since going through my internship experience, I have given much thought around this area. I believe some of the values that drive my work include service, connection, and positivity. Some of the most significant work I have done in this area includes self-assessments practices and continual self-learning. I have taken many tests including the 16 personalities test (I am an ESFJ), the IDI assessment (intercultural development inventory), and much of the culturally responsive classroom training I have been a part of over the past year. Moments of discomfort occurred when I realized that I have further to go in my journey toward cultural competence, as well as beginning to understand some work related weaknesses related to my ESFJ personality type. For example, I have a hard time when faced with conflict or practices that deviate from traditional ways of thinking. I crave environments where there are clear structures and people work well together. Additionally, I am a natural caretaker and value my ability to serve and support others. However, if I feel like I am not being validated or appreciated for my efforts, this can feel demotivating at times

In terms of continued growth in this area, I know I have more learning to do in the area of equity and cultural competency. Additionally, I think it will be helpful to identify a set of principles & practices that are "non-negotiable". That way, when faced with situations where conflict may arise, I will have an easier time knowing when it's worth it to hold my own ground, staying true to my beliefs, and when I can find ways to compromise and meet people halfway.

### **Organizational Management:**

Prior to completing my administrative internship, I had no idea how many plates administrators are spinning on a daily basis. Some of the new insights I gained came from helping principals plan the master schedules for their building. This task was much harder than I anticipated, as there are so many constraints that impact how things can be scheduled. Additionally, my experience at Middle School and High School is so limited, I had no idea what considerations are important within their day - for example, which types of classes are best suited for a split period over the lunch hour, and which classes should be taught in a continuous block. They also have many different structures for classes, different from elementary, like study skills, independent studies, hybrid classes, and PSEO programming.

Another completely new area of learning was the process for staffing in the spring. I did not realize how much time and energy goes into looking at sections, allocating staff, and strategic decision making around certain "flexible" positions (like a discretionary teacher that can be used in different ways). It was helpful to see how my principal communicated news around staff cuts, because this is such a sensitive subject to broach with teachers. I have learned that it is important to be respectful of peoples' feelings in the process and also to be very transparent with your decision making process. The choices are not always easy to make, but when staff can understand the "why" behind your decision, it helps them maintain a higher level of trust, regardless of whether they are happy with the end result.

Some of the experiences that really allowed me to grow in this area included planning for testing at the elementary schools, as well as my summer school leadership experience working as the site coordinator. In running the summer school program, I was tasked with developing my own master schedule, assigning staff members to specific classroom duties, planning a system for smooth arrival/dismissal, taking inventory of classroom supplies and ensuring that teachers had the resources they needed, along with many other daily management tasks that required me to delegate effectively.

Coordinating school wide testing is a huge responsibility, which also forced me to improve upon my teamwork and delegation skills. It is critical that a schoolwide plan doesn't rest on the shoulders of one person. Therefore, it was important to develop a team who could support the process alongside me. Asking for help is not an easy thing for me to do, but this was a big job that wouldn't have gotten done without support from a team.

### **Equity and Culturally Responsive Leadership:**

Equity and cultural responsiveness is an area that I firmly believe will never be completely finished in my own personal growth and learning. My biggest takeaway in this area is that culture runs deeper than many of the surface level characteristics I have grown up thinking were “culture” like food, clothing, ethnicity, holidays and traditions. I am fortunate that my district has provided PD opportunities allowing me to learn about the deeper layers of culture like gender, socio-economic status, religion, physical abilities, mental health, sexuality, age, political views, personal values, life experiences and world views. I am truly beginning to see how my own cultural identity impacts the way I show up in the classroom, interact with staff/students, and the expectations I hold of others.

An opportunity that was beneficial to me was collaborating with my schools’ equity teacher leaders. Throughout the 2021-22 school year, we led our staff through a book study (Zaretta Hammond’s culturally responsive teaching and the brain) and facilitated several professional development sessions focused on culturally responsive teaching strategies. My biggest takeaway is that we constantly have to think about how we can relate equity to some of the work we are already doing. The more we can weave it into current practice, the more relevant the learning becomes. Equity work fails when it's presented as a standalone PD session, or a checklist of new strategies to try. I’ve learned that being culturally responsive means that you are reflective in your teaching practice - an ongoing process. Responsive teachers are constantly considering how the materials/procedures/practices in their classroom are meshing with the unique identities of your students.

One area I would like to push myself to continue learning more about is trauma. As a future administrator, I want to support my staff in the ability to see situations through the lens of trauma, and effective ways to support students’ needs who are navigating trauma in their own lives.

### **Policy and Law:**

Policy and law was one area that I did not have a lot of experience or familiarity with, prior to beginning my administrative program. One of the biggest learning experiences was through my Policy and Law class. I never knew the rich history of court cases that have shaped educational policy and laws today. Some of the critical takeaways from these past case studies involve a better understanding of student rights, issues of confidentiality, and best practices when it comes to addressing situations where you may have to ask students questions or conduct searches.

Other experiences that have been valuable include sitting in on interview processes as well as student disciplinary procedures throughout my internship. Some critical takeaways here include:

- Student safety is a priority. Ensure that all school stakeholders are involved in policies regarding school safety and supervision.
- Be proactive in your policies and response to issues of bullying and harassment.
- Remember the importance of documentation, and how to do it well. Keep information straightforward/fact-based and know that anything written becomes part of a student's public record. It's also best to keep other student identities confidential (use "student 1" vs. a name)
- Value student rights. I've learned about giving students Tenneson warnings. There should be a clearly written student handbook with policies related to conduct and discipline. It is also best practice to have students sign paperwork to show they understand the student handbook, whenever involved in a conflict situation.
- As an administrator, you are an advocate for all students. It is critical to have a clear understanding of processes around mandated reporting, and ensure your staff are trained in this area.

### **Political Influence & Governance:**

After experiencing the Covid-19 Pandemic, the financial impact upon our school district has been devastating. We have felt the increased economic pressures through budget cuts, staff shortages, challenges in maintaining technology, overcrowded classroom spaces, and unfilled job vacancies in some of our essential district positions like paraprofessionals, transportation, and school support staff. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that our district is working to build strong connections with the community and garner support from our taxpayers, to ensure that we can continue to provide the world-class education our students deserve.

I had the opportunity to be a part of our district's Levy For Learning team, leading up to the fall election. Through this experience, I learned more about school financing and have a better understanding of how levees work, specifically the operating levy and capital projects levy our district will be adding to the November ballot. I was shocked to learn about special education funding. Required special education services cost the district \$20.8 million more than it receives each year, and English learner services cost \$3.4 million, putting additional pressure on the operating budget. I also learned the importance of positivity in communication when speaking with constituents, who are also battling hardships of their own. It was interesting to hear how our district leadership formulated their decisions, with a delicate balance between stability for our schools and students, as well as consideration of the financial hardships our tax payers are facing. If our Levy questions pass, we will still be underfunded compared to many surrounding districts like Wayzetta, Minneapolis, and Robinsdale, but it will be enough to increase our fund balance to more appropriate levels and reduce the need for additional budget cuts. Overall, I enjoyed the process of working with my building principal to develop and implement a

communication plan for our staff members and families. The last thing I learned is that when schools share election information, it is important to communicate accurate information and encourage people to vote, but we cannot attempt to influence the yes/no decisions within the duty day - teachers and staff members must remain neutral in their political stances.

### **Communication:**

Going into my field experience, this was an area I felt was a relative strength in my own capacity. Nevertheless, I have identified opportunities for growth in my communication skills. The most influential experience has been my training and initial practice with instructional coaching. The coaching process has pushed me to become a better listener. In reflecting on my own habits, I realize that during conversations I like to make connections and interject with my own experiences. I also feel the urge to provide solutions when listening to people talk through a challenge in their practice. Now, I realize the importance of providing time and space for teachers to be reflective in their thinking, and as their coach, use effective questioning techniques. It is much more meaningful when teachers can arrive at their own ideas, rather than being told what to do. It provides a sense of autonomy in their work and gives them ownership of their personal goals. Being reflective in my listening habits will be critical as a future administrator.

Another experience that was helpful in learning about communication was my time as a site coordinator during summer school. Here, I was reminded of the importance of positivity and clarity in communication. I was charged with handling many difficult issues, including transportation mixups, schedule changes, and student discipline concerns. I learned that it was helpful to remain calm and positive when speaking with frustrated families and always provide followup regarding their concerns. I will always remember the tip I learned in my student management class from Sasha Kuznetsov. When providing follow up, he would often include the words “I have already\_\_\_\_\_” vs. stating “I plan to \_\_\_\_\_”. This small shift in language shows people that you are proactive in your response and have already taken steps to support their needs.

In regard to clarity in communication, I have learned the importance of taking time to sit down and formulate clear communication structures for a school building. There were several summer programs sharing space at our school site. In hindsight, I learned that we did not have a good structure in place for always knowing who to contact about specific students. From a customer service perspective, many parents were juggled around when they arrived at school or made a call, because not all stakeholders were involved in knowing who to contact for specific purposes. If I could do things differently, I would have held a planning meeting with all the program coordinators who shared the summer school site and established a better plan for connecting and sharing information.

### **Community Relations:**

One of my most important core values is family, therefore this competency carries a lot of weight for me. It is vital that schools work to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all of our families. In my own experiences as a teacher, I know that students thrive when families, teachers, and administrators can work closely together as a team.

At the elementary level, some opportunities I have enjoyed included coordinating teacher appreciation week, as well as participating in a Native American Connections tutoring program. In coordinating teacher appreciation for my school, I connected with many local businesses and asked for their support in donating small gifts (gift cards/merchandise) as a part of a teacher appreciation raffle. Other things I did for teacher appreciation included having district leadership and students create thank you videos through FlipGrid, to express their gratitude for teachers' efforts throughout the year. I was surprised to see how quickly and unquestioningly community members were willing to reach out and support in some way. It inspires me to continue fostering relationships with community members when I am a leader in my own school. Through the Native American Connections program, I spent time tutoring a Native American student, and participated in cultural connection events, where an Elder from the community would come and share pieces of their Heritage and often read a story to the group. I felt this was a huge success - we were able to bring families together through a shared experience, and also have a very authentic way to learn more about their unique cultural identities.

At the Middle and High school levels I was fortunate to be involved in several community events including athletic games, the homecoming dance, freshmen orientation, and home visits during the COVID pandemic. I was nervous about conducting home visits during the pandemic, but pleased to see how touched families and students felt after that small gesture. Families were eager to connect, share their experiences through covid, and talked about some of their anxieties around transitioning to middle school during distance learning.

If I can sum up my experience in one takeaway, it would be the importance of providing avenues for families and community members to come together, share their experiences, and build genuine connections with the school community.

### **Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment:**

I am fortunate in my role as an instructional coach to have many opportunities for growth and learning within this competency as well. One experience that has been impactful is my work with the Curriculum Content Review, in preparation for the new ELA standards that will be used in 2025-26. This experience has helped me understand the importance of a well planned process for unpacking benchmarks, analyzing current practices, identifying curriculum needs, and phasing in new materials and resources. The importance of backwards planning is huge - teachers first need to understand their teaching objectives (the "why") before we can effectively

choose what we will use to instruct. I never knew how many years of pre-planning work were involved to effectively implement new standards or look at purchasing curriculum for a district.

If I had to choose an experience that caused some discomfort, I would say it was the overall experience of leading my schools as an instructional coach during the Covid Pandemic. Remote learning is something that was new to everyone, including myself. Over the past year, many teachers have turned to me for ideas and support. When putting together professional development sessions, I have learned that it is best to share strategies that are both high-impact and easy to implement. I have also learned that I do not have to be an expert all the time. Some of the most valuable learning that occurred was when I set up structures for people to talk and exchange ideas of their own. In my virtual learning academy PLC work, I would utilize tools like google surveys to identify specific areas of interest among the teachers. Then, I would intentionally plan for artifacts or examples the group could look at together. Some of these shared experiences included taking tours of virtual classroom environments, watching short videos of one another teaching, and leveraging tools like breakout rooms on Zoom to have meaningful group discussions.

Overall, I have learned that effective instructional leaders must take into consideration many things, including a solid foundational understanding of standards and best practice, using data/observation to understand aspects of the school that are working well, knowing how to provide guidance that is high-impact, but also feasible for classroom teachers, and remembering to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the staff and students.

### **Human Resource Management:**

Through the Human Resources class at Saint Mary's, I learned the importance of hiring high quality teachers in schools and the value of putting time and resources into retaining good staff members. I never thought about the financial impact of losing good teachers and how much it costs a school district to onboard new teachers. Additionally, it is a very expensive, lengthy, and complicated process to get rid of a teacher who is underperforming.

After finishing the HR course, I had the opportunity to be involved in various interview teams, both at the elementary and secondary levels. Insights I took away from the interview included having the right people represented on the interview panel, and ensuring that the principal has an organized system for interviewing, and knowing how to ask effective questions during the interview. I was also reminded that anything written down during an interview becomes a record that can be requested to be seen by the candidate - something to remember to remind my own team, when I am in the position of leading interviews. Lastly, I learned that administrators must use due diligence, and take extra steps like contacting multiple references, or using followup phone calls when necessary, to make the best decision for their school.

A separate experience that was also very beneficial was conducting classroom observations with my principal. I was surprised at how powerful it was to observe a teacher alongside a partner. The followup conversation about our noticings was really powerful because we both had different perspectives - we each noticed different things about the lesson. Without the shared experience, my own reflection wouldn't have been as deep. Allowing teachers to pair up and visit a classroom together is something I would like to try within my instructional coaching practice, too. My biggest takeaway from the evaluation process was within the post observation meeting. I noticed my principal often delivered critical feedback in the form of a question, instead of delivering prescriptive advice. This places the cognitive load on the teacher, in terms of what they might do differently next time. Often, the teacher knew exactly what could be changed without needing to be told.

### **Values and Ethics of Leadership:**

One thing I have realized throughout my coursework and field experiences is that administrators are faced with hundreds of decisions, many of which are not black and white. Often, there are many decisions that *could* be right, but some might be better than others. The critical factor that helps in these difficult decisions is having a strong understanding of the values that drive your own leadership. As a principal, if you can share your values with staff/students/families and provide transparency behind your decisions, the stronger foundation of trust you can build within a school.

One component of this competency that fit into many of my fieldwork experiences was “modeling democratic value systems”. There is an artform to balancing decisions that should be made by an administrator, and decisions that require input from teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. After watching my own principals navigate decisions in their day, I now see many ways for stakeholders to provide input. For example, team members can help develop shared norms for a group, take part in crafting vision statements, share in the development of school action plans, and create school-wide themes for the year. Teachers can provide helpful insights on school functions like creating schedules, providing suggestions for professional development, and identifying ways to improve procedural aspects of the day like arrival/dismissal, and lunch transitions.

A specific experience that comes to mind, in thinking about a democratic value system, is the opportunity to be a member of my school's improvement planning team. When we met as a group, my principal said “I appreciate all of you putting your time and energy into creating our school's goals. I really want this to be something you take pride in and is meaningful to you versus simply creating “my plan” to share with the school”. Sharing that statement aloud with the group clearly articulated her hopes and vision, and also reiterated how much she values teamwork and the ideas her staff members have.



As a future administrator, when I am faced with difficult decisions, I will remember to reflect on my personal values. Additionally, I will take time to consider the time constraints in which my decision must be made, and whether it would be more effective to include input from others when making my decision. Overall, I strive to create an environment where all voices will be listened to and valued.

### **Judgement & Problem Solving:**

A significant experience that helped me develop effective skills within this competency was the role playing scenarios throughout my student management course. At times, administrators can use a slow approach, allowing themselves significant time to reflect, or leverage a democratic approach to problem solving. At other times, a decision must be made immediately. One thing I have learned is, even in situations where you must make instantaneous decisions, the extra 30 seconds it takes to stop, breathe, think, and weigh your options can be extremely helpful in making a well thought out plan. I was surprised to see how taking time to role play different scenarios helped me feel more comfortable and confident in making quick decisions. This is a practice I will continue to use in the future, both for myself, and also with staff members.

In reflecting on decision making situations that allow for more time, I took comfort in seeing how often my own principals (who have years of experience and a wealth of knowledge) will pick up the phone and call a colleague at another school for advice. Admittedly, one thing that causes discomfort in becoming a principal is the idea that I might not have a team of multiple administrators - especially with many elementary school positions, there is only one principal. Therefore, it is crucial to build relationships and cultivate a strong professional network outside the walls of my school, as well as working closely with your support positions like the social worker, school psychologist, and office staff. I was grateful to have the opportunity to explore the MESPA (MN Elementary School Principals' Association) website with my mentor principal, and also within the Field Experience Seminar course. Here, I learned that principals have access to a directory of administrators, which highlights areas of expertise, among many other resources for professional learning. It is important to remember that technology makes it easier than ever for professionals to connect and cultivate supportive relationships.

### **Safety & Security:**

If students feel unsafe or threatened in their classroom environment, we simply cannot expect any learning to occur. Therefore, above anything else, safety and security is a top priority within our schools. This really hit home for me, when I had the opportunity to be the summer school coordinator. Leading into the experience, there were so many things on my mind and aspects of the day I was worried about (schedules, instruction, student engagement, parent concerns, etc). However, the night before school started, the biggest issue that kept me awake was: *I need everyone to make it safely home at the end of the day.* As a new school leader, and also as a new

parent, I understand this now better than ever. At the end of the day, parents want to know that their children are safe and well cared for.

I am thankful for the experiences I have had, helping facilitate lockdown drills and fire drills throughout my field experience. Again, reflecting on the student management class, role playing emergency scenarios was also beneficial in my experience. However, one situation that stands out involved a real scenario with a suspicious individual on our school grounds. Although I was not directly involved in this incident, I appreciate that our principal took time to send a followup email detailing the situation. In his email, he highlighted all the key players involved in the emergency response, highlighting what they did to respond in the moment. As a staff member, it helped me think about my own response in a similar situation, so that I feel more prepared and confident in the future.

As I have reflected on other competency areas, I can see how the various aspects of leadership overlap and support safety/security structures within a school. For example, in emergency situations, it is crucial to have effective judgment and problem solving skills. Additionally, without effective communication structures in place, you will not be able to respond quickly and effectively during a crisis situation. Without clear school policies and equitable classroom practices in place, students may feel threatened or unsafe in their learning environments. Nearly every other aspect of leadership provides the foundation necessary to create safe schools for all students.

### **Instructional Leadership:**

After going through my internship experience, I realize the importance of builder leaders modeling the attributes of a lifelong learner. I think students and staff are more inclined to put forward their best effort when they see building leaders making an effort to learn and grow alongside them. An important piece of modeling a learning mindset is the willingness to admit when you have made a mistake, or do not have an answer. Having the humility to accept your own shortcomings makes you more relatable and approachable, which are critical qualities for someone wishing to have an impact on instruction.

One of the largest and most beneficial projects I took on during my administrative internship was the creation of our district's math scope and sequence documents. On my team, I was tasked with the challenge of creating the guiding document for 2nd grade that would help plan and pace math content across all learning models (hybrid, virtual learning and in person learning). The goal of the document was to align instruction across the district and provide guidance specifically related to the challenges with covid, and resources to help identify, effectively teach, and assess our math standards. Throughout this process, I regularly met with a group of 2nd grade teachers in order to gather user feedback. At times, it was difficult to hear when things were not working well, but I reminded myself that it was important to listen without judgement and remain flexible if I wanted to be an effective instructional leader.

Working so closely with a grade level's curriculum was a truly beneficial experience. It reminded me of how many instructional aspects a teacher is tasked with balancing, from intervention to enrichment, prioritizing instructional needs, knowing the standards, and effectively assessing student learning, there are many factors that go into a teacher's planning. Having a deeper understanding of these aspects will help instructional leaders support teachers, using a balanced and purposeful approach.

### **Monitoring Student Learning:**

Taking part in the schoolwide consultation process has been a very beneficial experience, allowing me to see the ways in which school stakeholders work together to offer a variety of support to students. It is critical that school staff take a team approach towards students, always regarding kids as "ours" vs. "yours". The old saying, *it takes a village*, holds true in the school setting. I have had the fortune of being part of this team, both as a special education teacher and also as an instructional coach. Alongside me, other members on the team include the school social worker, school psychologist, intervention teachers, reading specialist, principal, classroom teacher, special education supervisor, and other support staff as needed. Simply knowing you have a strong network of support is helpful for any teacher facing challenging situations in their classroom.

Another experience that has been beneficial in helping me learn about monitoring student learning is my role as the ATPPS coordinator. Through this process, I learned how to use data systems to collect, organize, and present schoolwide data in ways that are easy to understand and meaningful to staff members. I was able to lead our staff through thoughtful discussions around schoolwide goals and action plans, using data as a piece of the puzzle to drive our decision making. I have used similar data warehouses to have individual coaching conversations with teachers, looking to learn more about specific students, plan instructional goals, and make meaningful decisions about how/what they teach within their classroom.

One challenge I believe still exists within this area is standards based instruction and grading. I see this as an opportunity for learning and growth with teachers as well as parents. Some of the barriers within SBI include the mindset shift required (thinking about progress over time vs. a cumulative average grade) as well as systems for organizing student work that make sense, and are manageable for classroom teachers. We have some excellent learning management systems in place, like Schoology and Seesaw for Schools, which allow teachers to build portfolios of student work, assess benchmarks, and track student progress in visually organized ways. Within the early implementation of these systems, I believe many teachers were hesitant to use technology. Fortunately, one good thing that has come from the Covid-19 pandemic is the "forced learning" that has happened for everyone. Now, teachers feel more confident with their technology skills, and I am eager to continue showing teachers how they can leverage technology to improve the efficiency and functionality of their data management systems.

### **Early Childhood Through Grade 12 Leadership:**

I am grateful for the breadth of experience, ranging from K-12, this internship has provided. Going into my internship work, I had the least amount of experience with middle/high school instruction, and the most time and experience spent at the elementary level.

One thing that left an impression on me is the complexity and depth of students' social emotional needs by the time they reach the secondary level. Additionally, the intensity of some of the student conduct issues in middle/high school is far greater than what I have seen and experienced in elementary school. In approximately two short weeks at the secondary level, I was exposed to issues involving drugs, threat assessments, misuse of social media, sexual harassment, explicit acts of racism, and misogynistic behaviors. It was very eye-opening, as so many of these challenges are bigger, more difficult to deal with, often involve legal aspects, and potentially pose serious threats to student safety. If more elementary teachers had a small taste of my experience, I believe they would likely feel more urgency in addressing topics like social-emotional learning, cultural competency, and digital citizenship at the elementary level. After learning from my secondary colleagues, I clearly see the importance of laying a strong foundation of skills that address the whole-child vs. spending all of our time on academics.

Although the challenges posed by secondary education seem intimidating, there were aspects of middle and high school leadership that I found appealing. Our secondary administrators are much more deeply involved with athletics and activities, often spending evenings and weekends attending school-wide events. I found that I enjoyed being involved in the school community in this capacity. As an extroverted individual, this work felt fulfilling. Additionally, I found value in having an administrative team at the secondary level. In getting to know myself more deeply, as an individual and a leader, I learned that I thrive in group settings where I am able to work collaboratively with other people. Although elementary principals still have a network of colleagues to work with, things feel more isolated at this level. Fortunately, I have learned from my principals about effective ways to help build a professional learning network. Additionally, I know I can continue to lean on my colleagues in the Saint Mary's community for support and advice as I embark on my administrative career.